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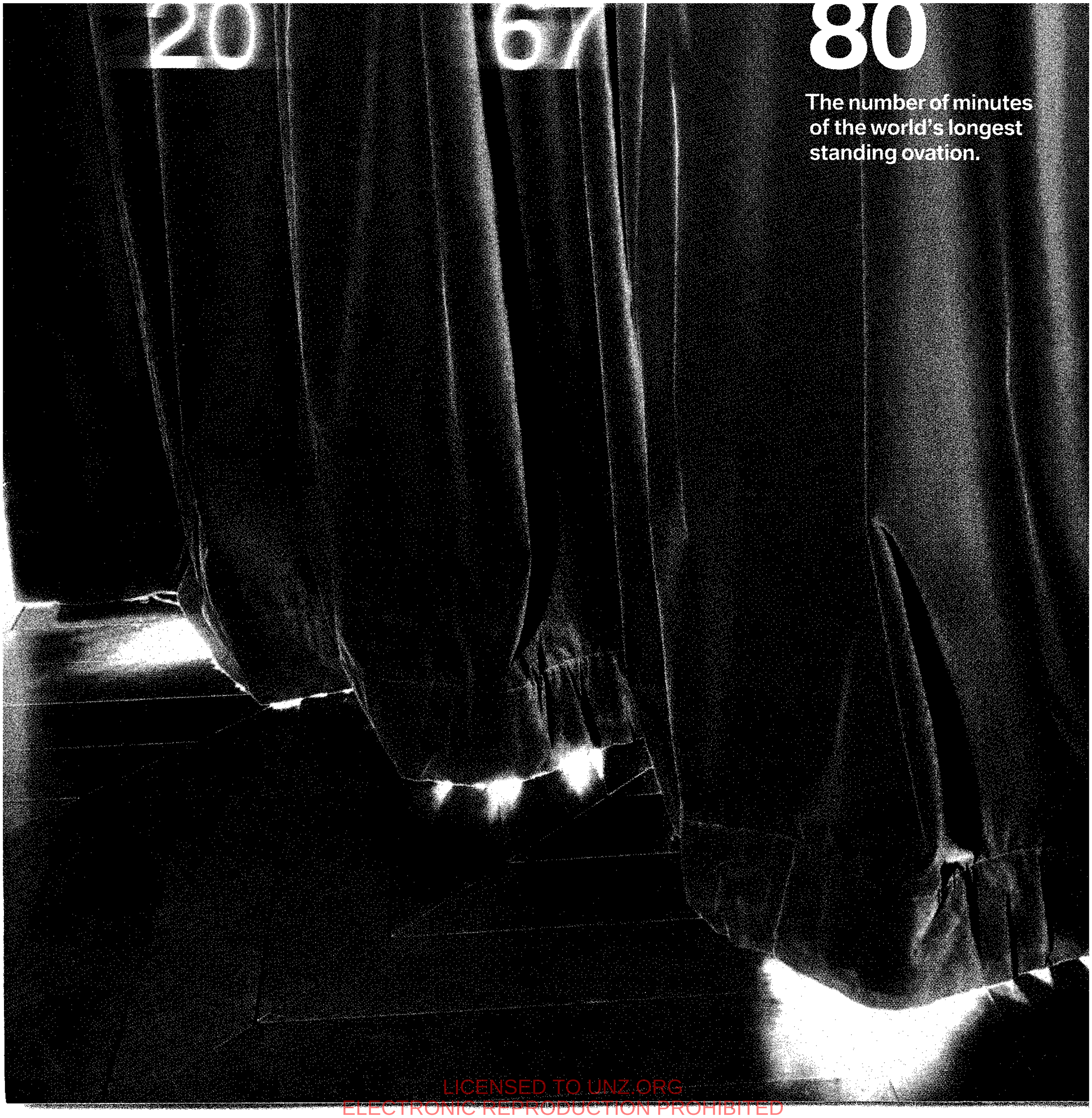

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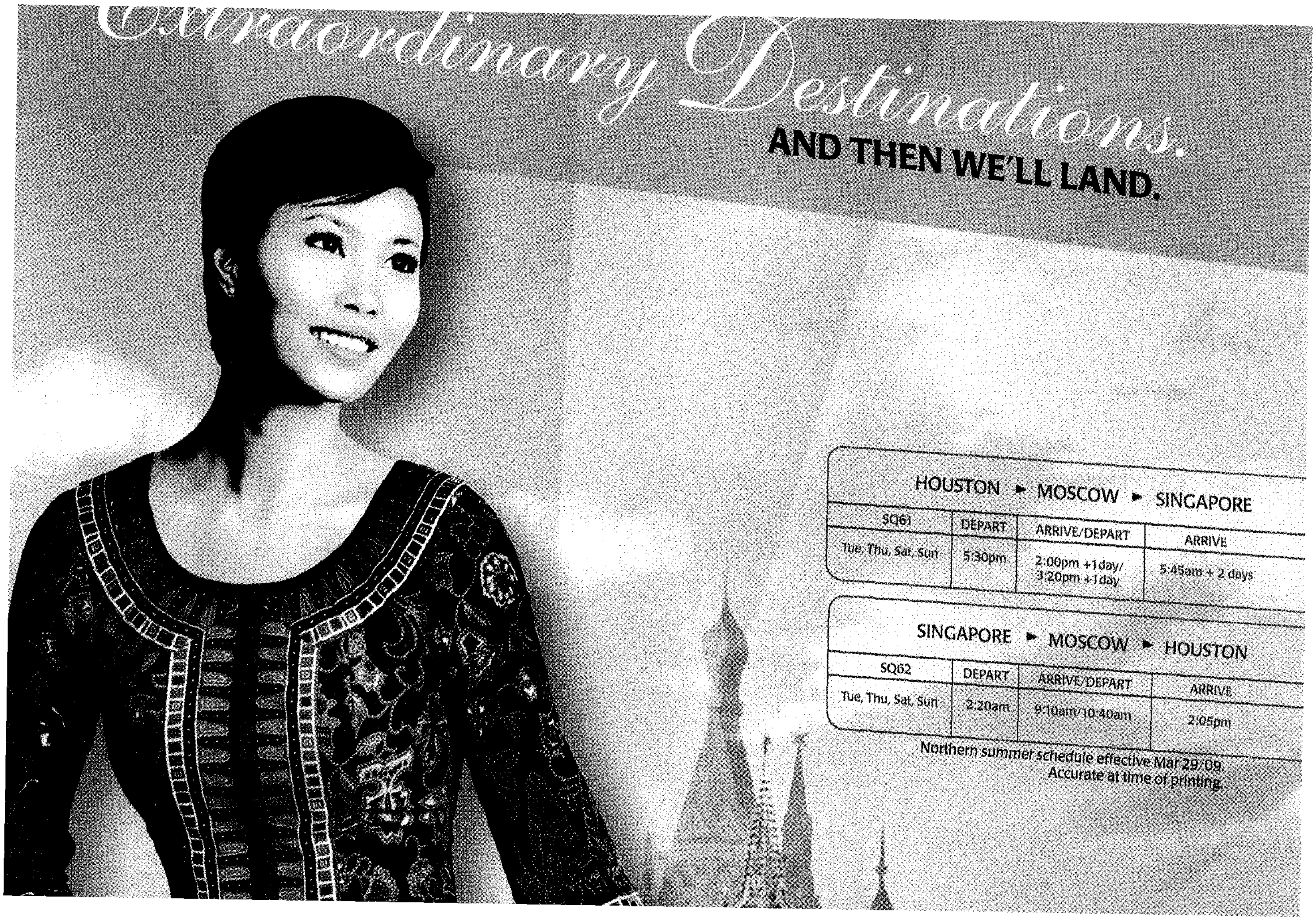
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CONTRIBUTORS

Alec Wilkinson ("Not Quite Cricket," p. 24) will publish his ninth book, "The Protest Singer: An Intimate Portrait of Pete Seeger," in April.

D. T. Max ("The Unfinished," p. 48) is the author of "The Family That Couldn't Sleep," a scientific and cultural history of prion disease. The book is available in paperback.

Ben Greenman (The Talk of the Town, p. 21) edits the Goings On About Town section of the magazine and is the author of "Please Step Back," which comes out in May.

Sasha Frere-Jones ("Flashing Lights," p. 32) is the magazine's pop-music critic.

Patricia Marx (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 37) recently published a children's book, "Dot in Larryland," with illustrations by Roz Chast.

Meredith Root-Bernstein (Poem, p. 42) lives in Santiago, Chile. Her poems have been published in the *Swarthmore Literary Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Bob Staake (Cover) has written and illustrated several children's books, including "The Donut Chef."

Ian Parker ("Lost," p. 38) is a staff writer.

David Foster Wallace (Fiction, p. 62) died in 2008. His book "This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, About Living a Compassionate Life," comes out in April.

Jean Valentine (Poem, p. 65), the current State Poet of New York, won a National Book Award for her poetry collection "Door in the Mountain." Her chapbook "Lucy" has just been published.

Roger Angell (Books, p. 68), a fiction editor at the magazine, has written seven books on baseball, including "Game Time."

Mark Ulriksen (Illustration, p. 69) is a regular contributor of cover art and illustrations.

John Updike (Books, p. 73), who died in January, contributed fiction, poetry, and literary criticism to the magazine for fifty-five years. He published twenty-three novels, including "The Widows of Eastwick."

Paul Goldberger (The Sky Line, p. 80), the magazine's architecture critic, is the author of "Why Architecture Matters," which is due out later this year.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

D. T. Max takes questions about *David Foster Wallace;* also, pages from the unfinished manuscript. / Audio: *Sasha Frere-Jones* talks about Lily Allen. / The Political Scene, a weekly roundtable hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden.* / Our online book club reads "Revolutionary Road." / New blogs: The Front Row, featuring *Richard Brody* on movies, and News Desk. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, James Surowiecki, Steve Coll,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / A complete archive of every issue back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

THE MAIL

HEALTH-CARE CURES

Atul Gawande provides a scholarly thesis on the evolution of health-care systems in Western countries toward universal health care ("Getting There from Here," January 26th). However, the National Health Service in Britain has precedent reaching back to the 1911 National Insurance Act proposed by David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a member of the House of Commons. Under this act, all wage earners below a certain annual income and between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five had to join the health scheme, in which workers, employers, and the state, in a proportion of 4:3:2, contributed. In return for these payments, free medical attention, including medicine, was offered. Workers in particular trades who contributed were also guaranteed a set weekly sum for fifteen weeks in any twelve-month period should they become unemployed. While the National Health Service, established in 1948, was inspired by a changing system of delivery during the Second World War, it was built on an arrangement established almost forty years earlier.
Gary Maltz, M.D.
Princeton, N.J.

I appreciate Gawande's historical perspective on the health-care systems of other nations, but there is something unsettling about framing the debate purely around practicality versus ideology (or idealism). How are we supposed to see past the limits of the current system if any attempt to depart too much from it is dismissed as ideology? The following questions should be raised in any discussion of health-care reform: Should health care be a for-profit industry? What are the roles of insurance companies in a system that should serve the public good? Is health care a human right, something on a higher level of importance than practicality? What is the responsibility of a democratic government in providing measures of social security such as health care to all its citizens? Fundamental questions such as these are appropriate when we are dealing with human lives and unnecessary suffering. Let's not settle for a "messy" solution to one of the great problems facing our country—all in the name of an abstraction called practicality.
Christine Casas
Houston, Texas

The United States will never be able to afford anything close to universal coverage without changes in how we pay to educate doctors and nurses, medical tort reform, and a reduction in the thirty per cent of health-care dollars that go to administrative costs, such as billing and collection. In France, the government pays the cost of almost all medical education; the program is competitive and prestigious, and you can earn a decent living, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. The French system is able to better balance primary care and specialist services, improve preventive health care, and still produce some of the best medical research in the world. Doctors there benefit less from overutilization of expensive procedures or from gaming the reimbursement system, and they don't have the excuse of needing to pay off their medical-school student loans. Another large part of the cost issue is related to doctors ordering extra diagnostic tests or expensive procedures of questionable benefit in order to protect themselves legally. The U.S. process of medical litigation is nonexistent in most of the world. Real cost savings in health care cannot be realized without tort reform. Finally, the waste in administrative costs may be reduced by some of the options Gawande explores—a single insurance payer or a more streamlined payer system.
Jeffrey A. Pollock
Beaufort, S.C.

•

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REFLECTION
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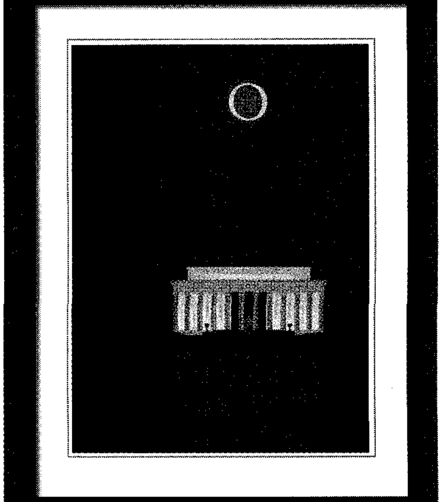

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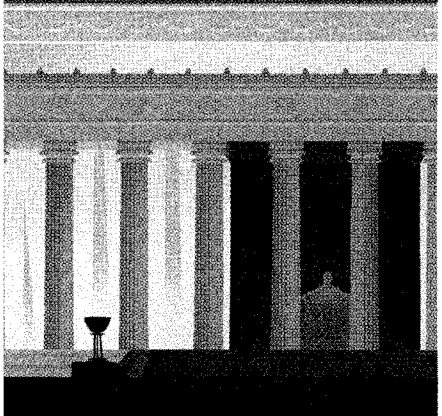

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The annual orchid show at the New York Botanical Garden. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
STRONG IMPRESSION

Jeremy Irons and Joan Allen return to Broadway for the first time since the eighties, to star in "Impressionism." Irons was last seen on Broadway in Tom Stoppard's "The Real Thing," in 1984 (he won a Tony), and Allen's last appearance was in 1989, in "The Heidi Chronicles" (she won a Tony for "Burn This" in 1987). Jack O'Brien directs Michael Jacobs's new play, about the intersection of the lives of a gallery owner and a photojournalist. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
GETTING GREEN

The fiddler Martin Hayes and the guitarist Dennis Cahill have been touring and recording together for years, and a week before St. Patrick's Day they will appear at Joe's Pub with their rip-roaring take on the sounds of Hayes's birthplace, County Clare. (See page 9.)

DANCE
PUNK MOVEMENT

Karole Armitage brings her sleek, daring troupe, Armitage Gone! Dance, to the Kitchen for a retrospective and a première. The program, called "Think Punk!," includes revivals of "The Watteau Duets" and the landmark work "Drastic Classicism," which hasn't been performed in New York for more than twenty-five years. (See page 11.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
Y HIGH

The 92nd Street Y, always a hub for vibrant chamber-music performances, goes into overdrive this week with a series of concerts featuring such musicians as the violinists Joshua Bell and Ida Kavafian and the cellist Steven Isserlis. (See page 13.)

MOVIES
CZECH MATES

Ivan Passer helped launch the Czech New Wave in the mid-sixties and continued his career in America, with such films as "Born to Win," starring Robert de Niro, and "Cutter's Way," with Jeff Bridges. MOMA will screen his work, along with the contemporary Czech documentarian Jan Sikl's eight-part series, "Private Century." The two filmmakers will appear on March 9. (See page 16.)

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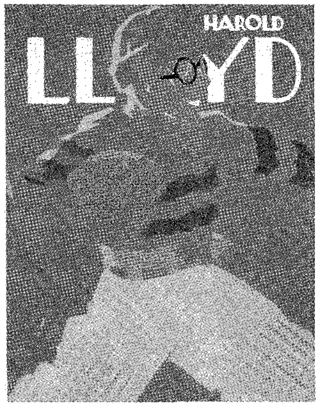
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MAN OF THE MIDWEST

Harold Lloyd was less stylized and eccentric than the two other great silent-movie comics, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. His jacket fit him well, and he wore neither a bowler nor a plate-thin hat. Here was a rather nice-looking, affable young man with a compact, flexible body and ordinary clothes. There was only one peculiarity: circular glasses with no lenses, which gave him a slightly baffled air, as if he were looking for something he already had in hand. He wears them under a leather helmet in an antic football game in "The Freshman," from 1925 (at MOMA on March 6), in which Lloyd longs to become the class favorite at a snooty college. Preparing for a fancy-dress party, he dons an unfinished, basted-together tux that slowly, agonizingly falls apart (despite many temporary fixes from a tailor hidden behind a curtain), revealing first his shirt and then his legs. The sequence is a masterly example of sustained gag-building, and proof that, even for the most inoffensive and presentable man, everything can go disastrously wrong.

—*David Denby*



BATISTE MADALENA, "THE FRESHMAN" (1925)/COURTESY JUDITH AND STEVEN KATTEN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

BLITHE SPIRIT
Angela Lansbury, Jayne Atkinson, Christine Ebersole, Simon Jones, Deborah Rush, and Rupert Everett star in Noël Coward's comedy from 1945. Michael Blakemore directs. In previews. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

DISTRACTED
Cynthia Nixon stars in Lisa Loomer's comic drama, about a mother whose son may have attention-deficit disorder. Mark Brokaw directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. Opens March 4. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

EXIT THE KING
Geoffrey Rush (in his Broadway début), Susan Sarandon, Lauren Ambrose, and Andrea Martin star in the Eugene Ionesco comedy, about a king who refuses to relinquish control of his kingdom. Translated and directed by Neil Armfield. Previews begin March 7. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

GOD OF CARNAGE
The latest play by Yasmina Reza ("Art"), which opened in London last year, directed by Matthew Warchus, about two sets of parents who convene to discuss the bad behavior of their children. James Gandolfini, Jeff Daniels, Hope Davis, and Marcia Gay Harden star. In previews. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GOOD NEGRO
Tracey Scott Wilson wrote this play, about black leaders in the American civil-rights movement in the sixties. Liesl Tommy directs, at the Public. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

GREEK HOLIDAY
At Abingdon, the New York première of a black comedy by Mayo Simon, directed by Stephen Hollis, about a couple who try to reconcile after the husband's infidelity. Previews begin March 6. (312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL
The Shakespeare in the Park production moves to Broadway. Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, including Gavin Creel and Will Swenson. Previews begin March 6. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAPPINESS
A musical directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, with a book by John Weidman, music by Scott Frankel, and lyrics by Michael Korie, about New Yorkers trapped on a subway train. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

HEROES
The Keen Company presents the New York première of Tom Stoppard's translation of this comedy by Gérald Sibleyras, set in 1959, about a group of Frenchmen who served in the First World War and are living in a veterans' home. John Cullum, Jonathan Hogan, and Ron Holgate star. In previews. Opens March 8. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HUMOR ABUSE
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a one-man show co-written by and starring Lorenzo Pisoni, about his experience as the youngest member of the Bay Area's Pickle Family Circus. Erica Schmidt, who co-wrote, directs. In previews. Opens March 10. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

IMPRESSIONISM
Jeremy Irons and Joan Allen star in this new play by Michael Jacobs, about the relationship between a photojournalist and a gallery owner. Jack O'Brien directs. In previews. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

INCIDENT AT VICHY
The Actors Company Theatre presents Arthur Miller's 1964 drama, about a group of men awaiting interrogation in Vichy, France, during the Second World War. Scott Alan Evans directs. Previews begin March 8. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

INKED BABY
The world première of a new play by Christina Anderson, about an infertile woman who asks her sister to carry a baby, while the world is plagued by an unnamed contamination. The cast includes LaChanze; Kate Whoriskey directs. Previews begin March 5. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IRENA'S VOW
Tovah Feldshuh stars in a new play by Dan Gordon, about Irena Gut Opdyke, who worked as a housekeeper for a Nazi major and went on to shelter Jewish refugees. Previews begin March 10. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

ROOMS A ROCK ROMANCE
A musical about two Scottish musicians who fall in love and go on tour together in the nineteen-seventies. Paul Scott Goodman wrote the music and lyrics, Goodman and Miriam Gordon wrote the book, and Scott Schwartz directs. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

33 VARIATIONS
Jane Fonda, Samantha Mathis, and Colin Hanks star in a new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman, about a musicologist studying Beethoven's fascination with a waltz. In previews. Opens March 9. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE UNSEEN
The American Actor's Company presents the New York première of a play by Craig Wright, in which two prisoners attempt to uncover the reason for their imprisonment. Previews begin March 5. Opens March 8. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

WEST SIDE STORY
Arthur Laurents directs the 1957 Bernstein-Sondheim-Robbins musical, for which he wrote the libretto. Matt Cavanaugh and Josefina Scaglione star. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ZOOMAN AND THE SIGN
Signature Theatre Company presents this drama by Charles Fuller ("A Soldier's Play"), about one man who terrorizes a community and another man who tries to defend it. Stephen McKinley Henderson directs. In previews. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7329.)

NOW PLAYING

CHAUTAUQUA!
The utterly original downtown outfit National Theatre of the United States of America is known for its reconstructions of oft-forgotten performance genres, and they've set their latest sights on the historical Chautauqua assemblies, the travelling lecture series and precursor to vaudeville that Theodore Roosevelt once called "the most American thing in America." With a keen eye for design and a penchant for the surprising, the young ensemble miraculously keeps this fusty-sounding project from devolving into a simple museum piece. With a standout performance by James P. Stanley and a guest speaker every night, they turn this bizarre footnote in American history into a timely dissection of the relationship between the arts, urbanity, community, and economics. The result is more than the sum of its parts: a beautiful meditation on the ways in which we inherit the present. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

GUYS AND DOLLS
Oliver Platt, Craig Bierko, Kate Jennings Grant, and Lauren Graham star; Des McAnuff directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

OUR TOWN
David Cromer's startlingly raw production of the Thornton Wilder classic, staged in the close quarters of the Barrow Street Theatre, has all the immediacy, vitality, and wit of "Adding Machine," his musical triumph of last year. He brings Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, up close, seating the audience in and around the action; the towns-

people lead cows and feed chickens right by our feet. Cromer plays the Stage Manager, narrating with matter-of-fact intensity, and the actors wear contemporary clothes and forgo quaint accents. Stripped of distancing theatrical conventions and sentimentality, Wilder's script and its simple, primal themes of daily life, marriage, and death stand out in all their beauty and anguish. (27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

RUINED

In Lynn Nottage's drama (under the direction of Kate Whoriskey), set in the present-day civil-war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christian (the lovely Russell Gebert Jones), a travelling salesman, persuades Mama Nadi (Saidah Arrika Ekulona), a brothel owner, to take in two young women who have been raped and brutalized by rebel soldiers, Salima (Quincy Tyler Bernstine) and the beautiful Sophie (Condola Rashad). Out of this despair, Nottage draws a unifying dramaturgical force: the humor in horror, especially embodied by the phenomenal Cherise Boothe, who plays a young prostitute named Josephine. The fighting outside escalates, and acts of bravery and desperation follow, as do speeches that are too self-consciously purposeful not to be corny. But at the end, as a couple dances, we are reminded of the many images we've recently seen of that other black couple dancing slowly, their belief in each other having similarly overcome all manner of obstacles, including the hatred of some of their countrymen. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/2/09.) (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THAT PRETTY PRETTY; OR, THE RAPE PLAY

The world première of a play by Sheila Callaghan, about a screenwriter who contemplates including a pair of ex-strippers who murder a right-wing pro-lifer in his screenplay. Kip Fagan directs, at the Rattlestick. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THIS BEAUTIFUL CITY

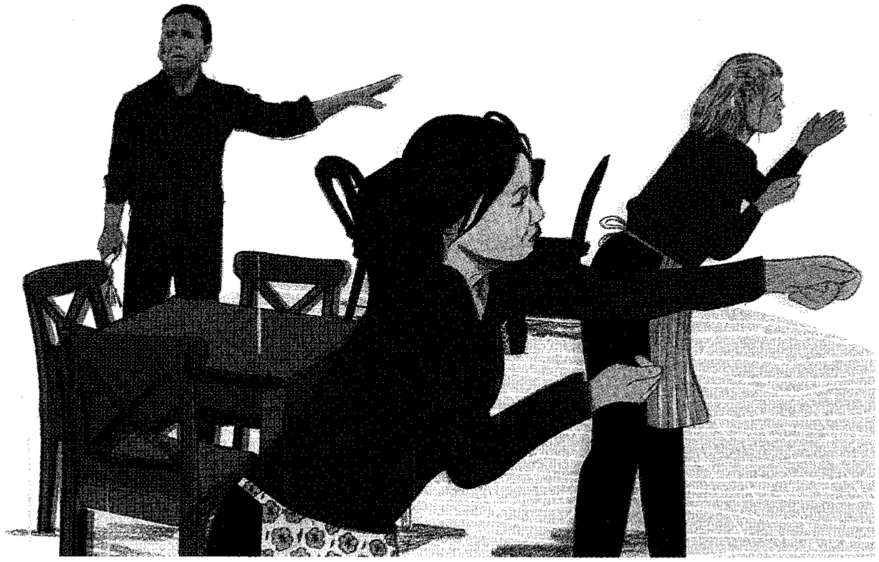
The Civilians—that scrappy band of stage documentarians helmed by Steven Cosson—travelled to Colorado Springs in 2006 to observe an evangelical community that, while they were there, was torn apart by the sordid accusations against its figurehead, Ted Haggard. With wit and empathy, the group reënacts, splices, and, in inspired instances, musicalizes the interviews they conducted of local residents, from a transgendered woman struggling to reconcile her Christian faith to the God-fearing folks at RHOP—Revolution House of Prayer. Aside from their theatrical panache, the Civilians deserve credit as top-notch journalists, creating portraits that are vivid, agenda-free, and marked by a benevolent irony. Their investigation probes not only the absurdity of American dogma but the unquenchable thirst for redemption that propels it. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE WINTER'S TALE

The bicontinental cast of the Bridge Project, which has been performing "The Cherry Orchard" in an exquisite production by Sam Mendes, now turns to another tale of lost time. Shakespeare's late drama is full of stylistic curveballs, swerving from court tragedy to bawdy pastoral and back. But Mendes binds the play together on the strength of stagecraft and of his compelling cast, which includes Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack, Ethan Hawke (channelling Tom Waits as the pick-pocket Autolycus), and the sonorous stage beauty Rebecca Hall. Touched off by a king's jealous rage, the decades-spanning story winds its way through fair and foul until it reaches its surreal conclusion, which, in Mendes's hands, is as elegant as a dream ballet. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through March 8.)

Also Playing

THE AMERICAN PLAN: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **ASTRONOME: A NIGHT AT THE OPERA:** Ontological-Hysteric, St. Marks Church, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CHERRY ORCHARD:** BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through March 8. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **HEDDA GABLER:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF):** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through March 7. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **UNCLE VANYA:** Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through March 8. **YOU'RE WELCOME AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W BUSH:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.



"Our Town," directed by David Cromer, at the Barrow Street Theatre.

RACHEL DOMM

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

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237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 4: The soft-rock singer-songwriter and guitarist **Christopher Cross** swings by with "Sailing," "Ride Like the Wind," and other hits from his early-eighties heyday. March 7-8: The Springsteen cronies **Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes.**

BEACON THEATRE

Broadway at 74th St. (800-745-3000)—March 5-6: The **Levon Helm Band.** Most famous for his role as the drummer and vocalist in the Band, Helm has also worked as an actor ("Coal Miner's Daughter"), and he's a throat-cancer survivor. He's been making music for more than four decades (last year, he released his first studio album in twenty-five years, "Dirt Farmer," and it picked up a Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album). In recent years, he's been holding court at his recording studio, which is in a barn attached to his home, in Woodstock, leading folksy concerts he calls "Midnight Rambles." His guests there have included Emmylou Harris, Ricky Skaggs, Elvis Costello, and Steven Bernstein. He's taking his Rambles on the road, and the guests here include **Joe Louis Walker** on opening night and **Phoebe Snow** on both nights.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 8 and March 11: The **Airborne Toxic Event,** a Los Angeles quintet that takes its name from Don DeLillo's novel "White Noise," has a flair for crisp dance rock. March 9: The **Black Lips,** a rough-around-the-edges neo-psychedelic garage act from Atlanta.

CARNEGIE HALL

Seventh Ave. at 57th St. (212-247-7800)—March 4: The R. & B. kingpins **Ashford & Simpson,** the rappers **Doug E. Fresh** and **MC Lyte,** and the soul singer **Anthony Hamilton** join the jazz pianist **Geri Allen,** the trumpeter **Terence Blanchard,** the saxophonist **James Carter,** the bassist **Ron Carter,** and many other artists for the opening concert in "Honor!," Jessye Norman's month-long, citywide festival of African-American culture. (For a complete schedule, visit www.carnegiehall.org/honor.)

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—March 6: **Johnny** and **Edgar Winter.** Of the two Winter brothers, who started out in Beaumont, Texas, in the seventies, the younger, Edgar, a keyboard player, scored the big rock hits ("Free Ride," "Frankenstein"); Johnny, a guitarist, stuck with the blues. They both believe in a hard and fast approach, though, and they both can growl and shout. This is a rare joint appearance. March 8-9: **Daryl Hall** and **John Oates.** Even at the height of their high-haired, dubiously mustached success in the eighties, Hall & Oates were never cool. But the Philly duo's canny blend of rock, pop, and blue-eyed soul has proved remarkably durable, even if they can no longer effortlessly crank out catchy singles like "She's Gone" and "I Can't Go for That (No Can Do)." The pair are currently touring to promote their new three-disk greatest-hits package, "Live at the Troubadour."

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—March 5: The powerhouse blues singer **Shemekia Copeland,** the daughter of the guitar legend Johnny Copeland.

HIRO BALLROOM

371 W. 16th St. (800-745-3000)—March 10: Widely celebrated in their native England while still only a cult act at best here in the States, London's **Razorlight** is a cocky foursome that plays a brashly ambitious rock, packing the hubris of Oasis with the classic pomp and circumstance of vintage Queen.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 5: The quirky Los Angeles torch singer **Eleni Mandell** kicks off a national tour with songs from her new release, "Artificial Fire." March 9: **Martin Hayes** and **Dennis Cahill.** County Clare, Ireland, is both Hayes's birthplace and a source of inspiration for the accomplished fiddler. He and Ca-

hill, his longtime guitar-playing accompanist, unearth tunes that are a far cry from stereotypical jigs and reels. The lyrical songs are stripped down and as welcome as a slow saunter down a country lane. But Hayes occasionally breaks into a brisk run, and when he gets wound up onstage, with his arm furiously bowing and his long locks flying about his head, you might think it's the very banshee he's fleeing.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—March 7: A live musical mashup as **Hazmat Modine,** which incorporates everything from harmonicas, tubas, drums, and lap-steel-guitar work to trumpet playing, goes toe-to-toe with the brassman **Steven Bernstein** and his hard-driving **Millennial Territory Orchestra.**

SANTOS PARTY HOUSE
96 Lafayette St. (212-584-5492)—March 7: The new **"Mister Saturday Night"** party promises a little something for everyone. This evening, the Brooklyn indie rockers **Chairlift** bring their updated take on the Cure to the main stage. In addition, the elusive American d.j. and producer **Maurice Fulton,** who lives in the U.K., will be spinning his mix of inventive beats. Downstairs, the Swedish producer **Freddie Cruger** delivers his Nordic take on hip-hop and house music.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—March 6: **Pentagram** is a long-running, ever-shifting heavy-metal collective from Virginia that has always lurked firmly beneath the mainstream radar. Though it began as a psychedelic band in the early seventies, Pentagram developed a grim heaviness to its sound and aesthetic that came to be a huge influence on metal's more contemporary subgenres like doom metal and stoner metal.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 3-8: **Michel Legrand.** Having written the score for "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and such piano-bar standards as "Theme from the Summer of '42" and "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?," France's most famous modern romantic composer doesn't have to worry about where the next rent check is coming from. But his jazz credits are also solid—Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Bill Evans were guests on the 1958 album "Legrand Jazz," and such contemporary heavyweights as Ron Carter and Grady Tate have been willing sidemen. He's joined here by the drummer **Lewis Nash** and the bassist **David Finck,** as well as by a string section and the harpist **Catherine Michel.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—March 3-4: The veteran post-bop pianist **George Cables** welcomes the drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts** as well as the saxophonist **Gary Bartz,** an associate of his for some four decades.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—March 5-8: The tenor saxophone titan Dexter Gordon's 1961 album "Dexter Calling" receives a contemporary gloss from the saxophonist **Eric Alexander** and a rhythm team headed by pianist **George Cables,** who worked with Gordon in the seventies. They'll be joined by the saxophonist **Dave Leibman** on the first two nights and the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** on the last two.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—March 6-7: A visit from the **SFJAZZ Collective,** a West Coast ensemble in name only, brings together venturesome luminaries, including **Joe Lovano, Dave Douglas, Miguel Zenón, Robin Eubanks,** and **Renee Rosnes.** The vibraphonist Stefon Harris is on a one-year hiatus, but the ensemble's mandate remains fresh interpretations of jazz classics and newly minted originals.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 5-8: **Dr. Lonnie Smith's** academic credentials and his ever-present turban may raise eyebrows, but what's undeniable is his skill at the Hammond B3 organ. One of the last of his breed, Smith is joined by the saxophonist **Donald Harrison,** the guitarist **Peter Bernstein,** and the drummer **Herlin Riley.** March 9: The **Mingus Orchestra.**

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 10: In her on-and-off career, the jazz-pop vocalist **Madeleine Peyroux** has delivered a bewitching blend of Billie Holiday-esque sass and country-and-Western spunk. She helped write the songs on her new record, "Bare Bones." Steely Dan's Walter Becker had a hand in the album's lead single, "You Can't Do Me."

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—March 4: A night of early-jazz music, with the pianist **Terry Waldo** in a solo ragtime performance. March 6-7: The gifted pianist and composer **Pete Malinverni's** "Invisible Cities" quintet includes the trumpeter **Scott Wendholt** and the saxophonist **Rich Perry.**

SOFIA'S RESTAURANT
221 W. 46th St. (212-719-5799)—What better way to distract yourself from the current financial crisis than by tapping your foot or dancing to **Vince Giordano and his Nighthawks,** specialists in the propulsive sounds of twenties and thirties jazz. On Monday nights, they play Club Cache, a downstairs room at this Italian restaurant adjacent to the Hotel Edison. Note: During the winter months, you enter through the hotel's lobby (look for the sandwich-board sign and lighted sousaphone on the street, and follow the arrows to the action).

THALIA THEATRE
Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—March 6: **Oliver Lake,** co-founder, in 1977, of the World Saxophone Quartet, continues his exploration of textures and rhythms, collaborating here with the propulsive pianist **Vijay Iyer.**

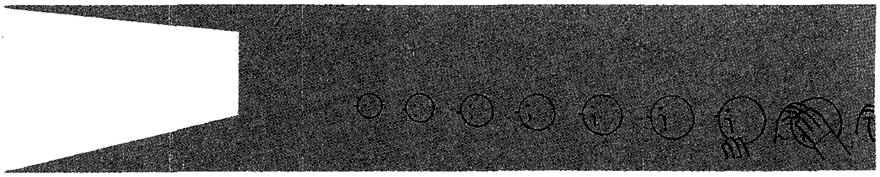
VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—March 3-8: **Roy Hargrove,** the onetime trumpet wunderkind, still has the spark that, back in the early nineties, first brought him attention. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100."** Through April 6. ♦ **"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Through May 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Through April 19. ♦ **"The Hugo Boss Prize 2008: Emily Jacir."** Through



DVD NOTES
EASTWOOD HO!

Clint Eastwood's overlooked historical drama **"Changeling"** (Universal), which was greeted by mixed reviews in October, was a well-timed lesson in democratic activism. Set in Los Angeles in 1928, it tells the true story of Christine Collins (Angelina Jolie), a single mother whose young son, Walter (Gattlin Griffith), vanishes. Under pressure to solve the case, the police—led by the Machiavellian Chief James E. Davis (Colm Feore)—deliver to her, with great fanfare, a boy they call her son, but who, she insists, is not Walter. The heart of the drama lies in her attempt to press her claim against the L.A.P.D. in the face of Davis's ruthless efforts to silence her, and the help she gets from a firebrand minister (John Malkovich) who inveighs from the pulpit against police corruption, and from a prominent attorney (Geoffrey Pierson) who takes her case pro bono.

Eastwood, who was born in San Francisco in 1930 and went to college in Los Angeles, takes evident pleasure in meticulously re-creating the era and setting (it's a delight to see Christine, at work as a supervisor in a telephone central, gliding through her workspace on roller skates) as well as the restrained public demeanor typical of the times (Jolie herself keeps the histrionics to the essential minimum). Above all, Eastwood shows the people protesting against arrogant and unchecked authority, and shows what it takes to arouse them—an activist clergyman, an able and willing lawyer, and a private citizen so aggrieved and outraged that she's willing to speak out and damn the consequences—and his lesson rings as true for Los Angeles in 1928 as for Poland in 1980 or Pakistan in 2008.

As a director, Eastwood's specialty has always been dramatizing the line where private life enters the public realm. In his first feature, the taut thriller "Play Misty for Me" (in **"Clint Eastwood: American Icon Collection,"** from Universal), from 1971, he stars as Dave Garver, a suave jazz d.j. who uses his on-air presence and local fame as a seduction device. When he meets and sleeps with a fan, Evelyn Draper (Jessica Walter), she reveals the depth of her obsession and the results turn bloody. The real subject of the movie, which raises it above the moralizing successor "Fatal Attraction," is demagogy. The chaos that Dave inadvertently wreaks, and his eventual comeuppance, results from using his public image self-servingly and retaining his magnified persona in his off-hours; and the political lessons to be drawn from it are as universal as those of his more overtly socially oriented later films.

—Richard Brody

LAURENT CILLUFFO

April 15. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Sites."** Through May 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family."** Through May 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002."** Through May 3. ♦ **"On the Money: Cartoons for The New Yorker."** Cartoonists laugh all the way to the bailed-out bank in this survey of seventy original drawings published in this magazine between 1927 and 2007. Barflies and fat cats, stuffed shirts and gold-diggers, ermine-clad royals and deli countermen crack wise about lucre. The tax man meets the guru on a mountaintop. Farmers harvest a new crop of M.B.A.s. Cash is trundled around by the wheelbarrowful, and frightened millionaires circle the limos. Stalwarts like Robert Weber, Lee Lorenz, George Booth, and Roz Chast contribute, with photographic portraits of selected artists by Anne Hall. Through May 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
235 Bowery (212-219-1222)—**"Mathias Poledna: Crystal Palace."** Through March 8. ♦ **"Daria Martin: Minotaur."** Through March 8. ♦ **"Jeremy Deller: It Is What It Is, Conversations About Iraq."** Through March 22. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Lutz Bacher: My Secret Life."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Kenneth Anger."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool."** Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JANET FISH
Fish is a deeply conservative painter, a technician wrangling with issues of reflection and refraction, content to work the well-trod turf of Matisse, (vibrant color, juxtapositions of patterns) and Cézanne (her subject is still-life). So what if the Bonnard show at the Met looks downright edgy by comparison? Scenes of glass vessels filled with poppies, peonies, and pomegranates, along with intricate surfaces of mirror and brocade (note the riotous exchange between a Suzani textile and a vase of zinnias), are an antidote to midwinter malaise. Through March 14. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111.)

"BUILT TO SURVIVE THE REAL WORLD"
The house organ of the West Coast Beats was Wallace Berman's magazine *Semina*. Regular contributors included the artists Bruce Conner and George Herms and the actors Dennis Hopper and Robert Dean Stockwell. Neville Wakefield has organized a grotty jewel box of a show with collages, assemblages, and photographs by the quartet, ranging from Hopper's 1961 "Bad Heart"—a black-and-white photograph of writing on a wall—to Stockwell's 2006 collage of *Life*-magazine logos sucked into a maelstrom. Bonus points for the rousing game of spot-the-homage: look for references to Cornell, Duchamp, Magritte, and Rauschenberg. Through March 14. (Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

PIERO MANZONI
It's bad-boy season. Kippenberger's at MOMA, and Manzoni, the self-taught Italian who tested the limits of painting and sculpture in his abrupt, influential career (he died in 1963, at the age of twenty-nine), has a museum-worthy show in Chelsea. A simple iron base, inscribed with the upside-down words "Socle du Monde" (seen here in a photograph), transforms the earth into a ready-made sculpture; cans labelled "Artist's Shit" mock both the commodification of art and the fetishization of the creative process. Best of all, the show places Manzoni in a wide-ranging context, exhibiting his "achromes"—scruffy canvases encrusted with colorless matter from white clay to cotton balls—alongside works by Yves Klein, Yayoi Kusama, Robert Ryman, Frank Stella, and others. Through March 21. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

MARK RUWEDEL
Ruwedel's modestly scaled black-and-white photographs of landscapes in the American and Canadian West combine the descriptive rigor of classic nineteenth-century survey shots with the more skeptical viewpoint of the nineteen-seventies' New Topographics crew. His results, installed in thematic, twelve-shot grids around the gallery, are as handsome as they are shrewd. Ruwedel documents the now abandoned sites of pioneering railways—trestles, tunnels, cuts, grades—many of which are being reclaimed by the wild. The most dramatic of his photographs depict the paths carved between mountains, reminders of the determined push west and the landscape's gradual push back. Through March 14. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

MATT WILSON
An English photographer now based in New York gives himself a mid-career retrospective, titled "This Place Called Home," in a rental space recently vacated by Moti Hasson. Wilson's pictures from Cuba, Ukraine, the Hebrides, and parts unknown—a series of vaguely forbidding landscapes, many taken at dusk or after dark—share a grainy, moody impressionism. But no matter how stylish this look, it doesn't feel second-hand. Even in the most mundane images—a figure in a doorway, headlights on a winding road, a slice of night sky seen through a circle cut into a ceiling—there's a sense of intrigue, a hint of seduction, or a peculiar feeling of dread. Through March 14. (535 W. 25th St. 510-219-3890.)

Short List

LUCA BUVOLI: Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through March 21. **GEORG HEROLD:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through March 21. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. and 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through April 11. **TONY OURSLER:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through April 11. **MIKA ROTTENBERG:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through March 7. **JOSH SMITH:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through March 14. **RUDOLF STINGEL:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through March 21. **JULIANNE SWARTZ:** Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990. Through March 28. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through March 28. **ANDREA ZITTEL:** Rosen, 525 W. 25th St. 212-627-6000. Through March 7.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ALAN CHIN
The photographs in Chin's "Dispatches, 1998-2008" all concern front-page news: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, Kosovo, China's Sichuan earthquake. This is familiar ground, and there are a few déjà-vu moments here—dazed people covered in ashes, a woman wading down a flooded street. But many more of Chin's photographs, like his artful black-and-white portraits of earthquake survivors, are behind-the-scenes views, pictures that flesh out headline stories. Perhaps the best of them is of a large group of Taliban prisoners crowded together in the corridor of an Afghani jail. Every face is arresting, at once Felliniesque and Biblical. Through March 7. (Wolf, 10 Leonard St. 212-925-0025.)

JACOB DYRENFORTH
In Dyrenforth's début at the gallery, images of orgies, pinups, feather-haired men, and occult symbols appear, at first glance, to be appropriated from photographs and posters. But they're actually painstaking renditions, made with pencil, spray paint, and, in some instances, thread, on paper. The portraits—of gurus, cult members, and others on society's fringes—document a zone of uninhibited experimentation and radicalization. A contagious nostalgia permeates the gallery, accentuated by a series of sculptures that suggest monuments to a failed utopia. Through March 7. (Renwick, 45 Renwick St. 212-609-3535.)

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
"Beloved Renegade," Taylor's newest (and his hundred-and-twenty-ninth) work, is a deeply reflective piece built around a Walt Whitman-like figure. On Thursday, it will be performed alongside his slapstick deconstruction of Stravinsky, "Le Sacre du Printemps (the Rehearsal)" and the enigmatic ". . . Byzantium," both from the eighties. Friday marks the first of only two performances of "Scudorama," an early work, and one of Taylor's darkest, followed by one of his most beloved dances, "Esplanade." Also new to New York is "Changes," an evocation of the fun and conflict of the sixties. For a full schedule, visit www.nycitycenter.org. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 3-5 and March 10 at 7, March 6 at 8, March 7 at 2 and 8, and March 8 at 3. Through March 15.)

SAVION GLOVER
The leading luminary of tap returns to the Joyce with "Solo in Time," a side trip into flamenco. Don't expect any but the most casual references to that dance form, or any evidence that Glover has studied its traditions. He relies on his ear, which usually merits such trust. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 3-4 and March 10 at 7:30, March 5-6 at 8, March 7 at 2 and 8, and March 8 at 2 and 7:30. Through March 22.)

BATSHEVA DANCE COMPANY
Ohad Naharin's Tel Aviv-based company has become a major presence on the international scene, but prominence, it seems, has its price. Through no fault of its own, this much loved troupe has become a lightning rod for the Israeli-Palestinian question; several of its U.S. performances have been met with protests by anti-Israeli groups. Nevertheless, the show goes on, defiantly unpolitical, at least in the obvious sense. "Max," an evening-length work set to a driving, mysterious score composed by Naharin (under a pseudonym), is a departure from his usual collages of sophisticated pop and electronica. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. March 4-7 at 7:30.)

ARMITAGE GONE! DANCE
"Think Punk!" is a welcome retrospective of Karole Armitage's breakthrough output from the eighties,

when Armitage, a budding choreographer and Cunningham standout who favored a violent attack and punk music, was heralded as a perverse vindication of classical dance values. “Drastic Classicism,” the piece so praised, is joined by “The Watteau Duets” (1985), a pas de deux partly performed in stiletto heels, and “Wild Thing” (1987), a duet to the Jimi Hendrix cover. “Mashup,” a full-company première, stays in a similar spirit, clothed in a concept of the French philosopher Guy Debord. (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. March 4-7 at 8. Through March 14.)

MONICA BILL BARNES & COMPANY
An ugly orange door provides the only décor for “Another Parade,” Barnes’s entertaining contribution to the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival. As the score jumps between Bach cello suites and James Brown, a knockout quartet of pumped-up ladies power through rhythmically sharp routines tweaked with idiosyncratic gesture—shadowboxing, victory poses, belly flashes. Mugging as if for individual members of the audience, the group suggests, to great comic effect, a mentally unstable drill team. (Ailey Citigroup, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. March 4-5 and March 7 at 8 and March 8 at 2.)

AWAJI PUPPET THEATRE COMPANY
Bunraku puppets are highly articulate and exquisitely costumed, with lifelike movements and the ability to change expression. The four-foot-tall puppets are each manipulated onstage by three masked puppeteers and accompanied by the shamisen (a three-stringed instrument) and a chanting storyteller. The Japan Society presents one of the greatest exponents of this tradition, performing traditional works: tales of jealousy, suicide, and magical transformation. (333 E. 47th St. 212-832-1155. March 5-6 at 7:30 and March 7 at 2:30 and 7:30.)

SASA ASENTIC
The Serbian choreographer brings to New York a lecture-demonstration on the plight of an Eastern European artist negotiating cultural expectations as he confronts audiences west of home. The theory-laden viscosity of the text is leavened, somewhat, by mime, audience participation, and stick-on fur. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 5-7 at 7:30.)

"MODERN [DANCE] MUSICALS"
Doug Elkins hosts this cabaret evening of short dances set to songs from Broadway musicals. His own celebrated “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” establishes the slanted approach, half-mocking, half-indulgent, followed up by a “Mary Poppins” medley with Gina Gibney. Among other promising combinations, Deborah Lohse picks the Andrews Sisters trio from “Company,” Tami Stronach takes on “Cabaret,” and Nicholas Leichter and Monstah Black ease on down the road with “The Wiz.” (Joe’s Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. March 5 at 7:30, March 6 at 8, and March 7 at 9:30.)

DANCE BY ALAN DANIELSON
A choreographer of craftsmanship and gentle humanism in the Humphrey-Limón tradition, Danielson presents “A Way Here,” a suite of scenes and encounters for an international cast that touches on the distances, literal and metaphorical, between people. “Real-Time Review” places Gus Solomons, Jr., in a critic’s fantasy: as he audibly works out his description of the dance in progress, the cast begins to follow his instructions, even as they get out of hand. (St. Mark’s In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 5-7 at 8:30.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
At the Guggenheim, Christopher Wheeldon and a few of his collaborators present last season’s “Commedia,” set to Stravinsky’s spirited “Pulcinella Suite.” The dancers include the fast-rising youngster Cory Stearns, of American Ballet Theatre, as well as that company’s luminous Hee Seo. Isabel Toledo (who designed Michelle Obama’s inauguration outfit) and her husband, Ruben, will discuss their designs for the ballet, and George Steel (the newly named artistic director of New York City Opera) will moderate. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. March 8-9 at 7:30.)

Till Fellner performs at the Metropolitan Museum on March 6.

FRANCESCO CARROZZINI

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
A star-making performance from Sondra Radvanovsky, in the role of Leonora, is but one highlight of David McVicar’s new production of **“Il Trovatore,”** which, thankfully, banishes the ghost of the company’s disastrous 2000 staging. With charismatic and capable singing from Dolora Zajick, Marcelo Álvarez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; voices and instruments fuse powerfully under the baton of Gianandrea Noseda. (March 4 and March 7 at 8 and March 10 at 8:30.) ♦ Even for a bel-canto opera, Bellini’s **“La Sonnambula,”** a melodrama about a sleepwalking girl in a Swiss village, strains the suspension of disbelief. It needs great artists: written for Pasta and Rubini, the finest Italian singers of the day, it flourished famously via the voices of Maria Callas and Cesare Valletti in the legendary 1955 production (by Luchino Visconti) at La Scala. Mary Zimmerman, the daring director who turned “Lucia di Lammermoor” on its head last season, gives the old warhorse a revisionist treatment, working with two more singers bound for greatness, Natalie Dessay and Juan Diego Flórez; Evelino Pidò. (March 6 at 8.) ♦ With its bold design and cinematic sweep, Anthony Minghella’s production of **“Madama Butterfly”** inaugurated Peter Gelb’s regime at the Met, and it remains compelling in revival. It returns with its original leading singers, Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, Maria Zifchak, Marcello Giordani, and Dwayne Croft; Patrick Summers. (March 7 at 1.) ♦ By taking the title role in Dvořák’s tender fairy-tale opera **“Rusalka”** (about a water nymph who yearns to be human), Renée Fleming helped cement her hold upon Met audiences in the late nineteen-nineties. She brings her persuasive presence to the piece again this month, in what will be her last role at the house this season. She will be joined by an impressive cast that also features Christine Goerke, Aleksandrs Antonenko, and, not least, the beloved Stephanie Blythe; the Czech master Jiří Bělohlávek conducts. (March 9 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

DICAPO OPERA
Peter Gelb is not the first general manager of the Met to indulge in innovative programming. Under Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Met presented a bushel of (mostly American) new operas early in the last century; Dicapo provides a taste of such rarities as Hanson’s “Merry Mount,” Krenek’s “Jonny Spielt Auf,” and Louis Gruenberg’s “The Emperor Jones” in a concert of scenes and arias offered by the company’s young artists. (184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. March 7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

DEUTSCHE KAMMERPHILHARMONIE BREMEN
Lincoln Center wraps up the classical portion of its festival inaugurating the spectacularly renovated Alice Tully Hall with a free, hour-long midday concert by members of the vibrant ensemble, featuring music by Beethoven (the Octet for Winds and the “Grosse Fuge”) and Bach (the Keyboard Concerto in D Minor, with the pianist Hélène Grimaud). (March 4 at 1. Tickets will be available at the Alice Tully Hall box office on March 3.)

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS
Alondra de la Parra leads her excellent ensemble of young professionals in a concert hailing American women composers, featuring contemporary works by Libby Larsen, Joan Tower (“Made in America”), and Tania León (“Kabiosile,” with the pianist Jade Simmons), as well as the late-Romantic composer Amy Beach’s “Gaelic” Symphony. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100. March 5 at 7.)

SAINT THOMAS CHOIR: HENRY PURCELL
Another classical birthday to watch in 2009 is the three-hundred-and-fiftieth of Henry Purcell, the audacious genius of the English Baroque. John Scott and his renowned church choir perform the Te Deum and the affecting “Funeral Music for Queen Mary.” (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. www.saintthomaschurch.org. March 5 at 7:30.)

"HONOR!" FESTIVAL: "SACRED ELLINGTON"
Carnegie Hall’s festival celebrating the legacy of African-American music, curated by Jessye Norman, is a sprawling three-week affair that extends over a range of genres. One of the highlights is an extraordinarily rare performance of excerpts from Duke Ellington’s “Sacred Concerts,” rich tonal and spiritual fantasies that mesh the jazz and classical worlds. In addition to Norman’s shining soprano, the concert features the Flux Quartet, a “Sacred Ellington” jazz ensemble, and the Sacred Voices gospel choir; the location is the Duke’s beloved Cathedral of St. John the Divine. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-247-7800. March 7 at 8. For full schedule, see www.carnegiehall.org.)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The exacting Pierre Boulez brings America's finest orchestra to Carnegie Hall. March 9 at 8: The French maestro makes a departure into Slavic music with a program featuring Janáček's Sinfonietta, Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with the formidable Frank Peter Zimmerman), and Stravinsky's "Pulcinella" (complete). ♦ March 10 at 8: More music by Stravinsky (including "Symphony in Three Movements") propels the orchestra into the final concert, a program also featuring works from the Franco-American modernist spectrum by Elliott Carter (the New York première of "Réflexions") and Varèse ("Ionisation" and the raucous "Amériques"). (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

"CHAMBER MUSIC AT THE Y"
The serenade, born in the aristocratic Classical era, flourished under the Romantics as a form of serious fun. Examples by Beethoven, Dohnányi (the evergreen Serenade for String Trio), and Brahms (the original nonet version of the Serenade No. 1 for Orchestra) are offered this week at the 92nd Street Y by a roster of musicians that includes the violinists Jaime Laredo and Ida Kavafian and the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 3-4 at 8.)

BELCEA QUARTET
The Chamber Music Society brings the commanding young English group to the fabulously renovated Alice Tully Hall to perform string quartets by Prokofiev (No. 1 in B Minor), Haydn, and Schubert (in D Minor, "Death and the Maiden"). (212-875-5788. March 4 at 7:30.)

MEREDITH MONK
The Guggenheim Museum offers a series of three concerts that explore how Asian influences have filtered through the works of prominent American experimentalist composers. Monk and her vocal ensemble go first, filling the spiralling galleries of the museum's rotunda with her site-specific "Ascension Variations." (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. March 5 at 6:30 and 9.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "AROUND PROKOFIEV"
Prokofiev may not be best known for his chamber music, but the Society, in an ingenious five-concert series this month, puts the Russian master in context with music by a variety of composers from his turbulent times. March 5 at 7:30: The piano, of course, figures prominently in any Prokofiev survey; Frederic Chiu goes first at the keyboard, offering scintillating solo works by the young composer (as well as Schoenberg's Three Pieces, Op. 11) in a concert at the Rose Studio in which the Orion String Quartet (among others) performs Stravinsky's Three Pieces for String Quartet and Debussy's "Danse Sacrée et Danse Profane." ♦ March 8 at 5: As the adult Prokofiev moves on to Paris, the soprano Measha Brueggergosman and the pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet join several artists of the Society at Alice Tully Hall in a concert featuring the composer's Five Poems for Voice and Piano along with songs and instrumental works by Stravinsky, Poulenc, Satie, and Ravel (the Sonata for Violin and Piano). (212-875-5788.)

92ND STREET Y: "STEVEN ISSERLIS & THE ROMANTIC GENERATION"
The acclaimed English cellist, joined by the fine young pianist Dénes Várjon, delves into chamber music by three nineteenth-century masters. March 5 at 8: The musicians offer a raft of Schumann, including the Five Pieces in Folk Style and Isserlis's transcription of the Sonata No. 3 in A Minor for Violin and Piano. ♦ March 8 at 3: An all-Chopin concert, with the violinist Daniel Phillips as guest, includes the Piano Trio in G Minor and, naturally, the Sonata for Cello and Piano. ♦ March 10 at 8: The series concludes with music by Mendelssohn, with Isserlis and Várjon joined by the glamorous sounds of the violinist Joshua Bell in a program featuring the Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano and the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Minor. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET
The spoken word intrudes on the music-making of this smart and impeccably refined ensemble in a concert that features not only a performance of Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ"—with a new poem by Mark Strand, read by the poet—but also one of Lee Hyla's "Howl," in which the quartet will accompany the voice of Allen Ginsberg in his recording of his raucous Beat poem. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. March 6 at 7:30.)

TILL FELLNER
Like one of his mentors, Alfred Brendel, the young Austrian pianist marries a superb technique with a contemplative sensibility. His recital at the Metropolitan Museum is all-Beethoven: the Sonatas Nos. 1-3 and No. 23 (in F Minor, "Appassionata"). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. March 6 at 8.)

ENSEMBLE PI
The admired new-music collective's fourth annual concert for peace at Cooper Union offers new works by Philip Miller ("Can You Hear That?," a reflection on the Iraq War employing texts by Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris), Krzysztof Penderecki (the New York première of "Sextet"), and Kristin Norderval, reaching back into the repertory for Britten's Canticle III, "Still Falls the Rain" (with the tenor Scott Murphree). (Third Ave. at 7th St. March 7 at 7. No tickets required.)

SEQUITUR
Lyricism is the calling card of the latest concert by this elegantly adventurous new-music ensemble: works by Gabriela Lena Frank ("New Andean Songs"), Donald Crockett (his setting of Michael Ondaatje's poem "The Cinnamon Peeler"), and Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon. They have performers any composer would envy—the singers Tony Arnold and Mary Nessinger and the conductor Bradley Lubman. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 10 at 8.)

MOVIES
OPENING

LA BELLE PERSONNE
Christophe Honoré directed this contemporary adaptation of the seventeenth-century novel "La Princesse de Clèves," starring Léa Seydoux as a high-school student who falls in love with her Italian teacher. In French and Italian. Opening March 6. (BAM.)

EVERLASTING MOMENTS
A drama, directed by Jan Troell, about an early-twentieth-century Swedish housewife who becomes a photographer. In Swedish. Opening March 6. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

EXPLICIT ILLS
Mark Webber directed this drama, set in Philadelphia, featuring four interlinked stories about love and drugs. Starring Paul Dano and Rosario Dawson. Opening March 6. (Angelika Film Center.)

FADOS
A documentary, directed by Carlos Saura, about the sultry Portuguese musical genre. In Portuguese. Opening March 6. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE FRONTIER OF DAWN
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 6. (BAM.)

PHOEBE IN WONDERLAND
A drama, directed by Daniel Barnz, about a young girl (Elle Fanning) who is cast in a production of "Alice in Wonderland" and begins to fantasize that the play is reality. Opening March 6. (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

REUNION
Alan Hruska directed this drama, about members of a Yale secret society who meet years later to reassess a friend's death. Opening March 6. (Quad Cinema and 62nd & Broadway.)

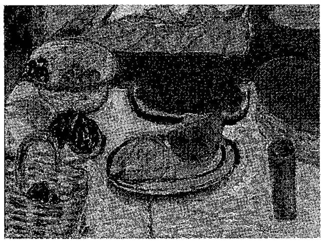
SHERMAN'S WAY
A comedy, directed by and co-starring Michael Shulman, about the unlikely friendship of an inhibited law student (Shulman) and a free-spirited former athlete (James LeGros). Opening March 6. (Village East Cinemas.)

TOKYO!
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 6. (Sunshine Cinema.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
OPTIC FIBER

Looking at the eighty or so works in "Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is like pressing your face into flower beds of gaudy annuals, if not into bright mud. The great homebody's paintings—furiously dense still-lifes, interiors, and the odd self-portrait, made in the South of France in the two decades before his death, in 1947—go all out for encrusted dazzle, with drenching color that tilts toward enthusiastic orange, in one mood, and toward bashful violet, in another. The light is Mediterranean squared. The hour is lunchtime forever. The visual experience can suggest a happy flaw in your eyesight: incandescent cataracts. This is radical stuff, still. It nails down one unflankable extreme in modern painting. Picasso paid Bonnard the tribute of loathing him, calling his work "piddling" and dismissing his style as "a potpourri of indecision." In truth, no other way of painting could so thoroughly insult the Spaniard's intellectually rigorous fortes of structure and line. Tissues of sheer sensation, Bonnard's pictures stymie mental clarity as effectively as that postprandial extra glass of wine.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



PIERRE BONNARD, "THE DESSERT" (1940) © ARS, NY/ADAGP, PARIS

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Nikita Mikhalkov directed this update of "12 Angry Men." In Russian. Opening March 4. (Film Forum.)

WATCHMEN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 6. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE CLASS
Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Parisian public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French postcolonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/08.) (In limited release.)

CORALINE
The spindly metal claw, like a tarantula made of steel, squeezes under a door and comes right at you; the hummingbirds hover before your face. The animated "Coraline," seen in its 3-D version, now and then uses the third dimension aggressively, for nose-biting or swooping effect, but most of the time, the writer-director Henry Selick, working with Neil Gaiman's novel, extends his reach into space as a way of increasing mobility and adventure—as a gift to imagination. There's a lot of barrelling through tunnels and dashing into rooms, and also some very startling effects, such as when the heroine, Coraline (voiced by Dakota Fanning), a spunky eleven-year-old girl, is walking with an all-knowing cat (Keith David) and both of them are under the control of a witch who suddenly, piece by piece, turns everything around them into white blankness. All dimensions, it seems, can be erased. Coraline longs for more attention than she's getting from her parents, so she enters a parallel world in which her parents are very attentive indeed—so attentive that they want to take control of her and sew buttons into her eyes and turn her into a ghost child. Scary and elegant.—*D.D.* (3/2/09) (In wide release.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON
A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasionally touches the uncanny but that often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly.—*D.D.* (2/9 & 16/09) (In wide release.)

THE FLY
Jeff Goldblum is the brilliant loner scientist Seth Brundle, who turns into Brundlefly, in David Cronenberg's remake of the 1958 horror film. Cronenberg gives the B-picture material new weight, and, for what this version is, it's very well done. In the first half, Brundle and a science reporter, played by Geena Davis, become lovers, and their scenes have a romantic-comedy edge. But Cronenberg narrows the film down to one man's decaying body, and concentrates your attention on one stage after another of poor Brundle's becoming bent over double and deformed. Cronenberg wants to drive you to revulsion. And if the movie has power, it's simply in our somewhat prurient fixation on watching a man rot until finally he's pleading for a coup de grâce. So, despite Goldblum's terrific performance and despite the graceful teamwork between him and Geena Davis, moviegoers may not feel that they're having such a great time. Released in 1986.—*Pauline Kael* (IFC Center; March 6-7.)

FRIDAY THE 13TH
A reboot of the popular horror series (the 1980 original was a rip-off of the infinitely superior "Halloween") about the murderous madman Jason Voorhees, whose mother was killed by a camper at Camp Crystal Lake. In this version, he takes his revenge on a group of nubile, pot-smoking campers in the usual grotesque ways (bow and arrow, hatchet, machete), and the screaming never stops. The most popular slasher films of the seventies and eighties earned their scares through low-budget scuzziness, tight screenplays, and suspense. The recent rash of remakes (such as "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and "The Hills Have Eyes") have traded that uniqueness for wide-screen lensing, mediocre dialogue, and unimaginative violence. This slasher film is about as exciting as a visit to the butcher. The fresh-faced unfortunates include Jared Padalecki and Danielle Panabaker; the routine direction is by Marcus Nispel.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE FRONTIER OF DAWN
The intense romanticism of Philippe Garrel's new drama arises both from its story of love unto death and from the director's self-revealing artistry. The passionate relationship between François (Louis Garrel, the director's son), a photographer, and Carole (Laura Smet, the daughter of Johnny Hallyday and Nathalie Baye), the actress he's hired to take pictures of, is also that of the director's camera with the actress. The cinematographer William Lubtchansky's silken black-and-white images caress, with a transcendently chaste sense of rapture, every trait of Smet's luminous face: her clear skin, sparkling eyes, arched hairline, and classical lips. When circumstances pry Carole and François apart, the plot enters the familiar realm of *l'amour fou*; even in her absence, the actress remains an indomitable force in the photographer's life. Within the modernistically shattered framework of conventional melodrama, Philippe Garrel conveys an extravagant, heartfelt blend of tenderness, pain, and longing. In French.—*Richard Brody* (BAM.)

GOMORRAH
A hell of a film, if you can take the hell. Matteo Garrone's movie is adapted from a 2006 book, an inflamed investigation of organized crime in Naples, by the journalist Roberto Saviano. The screen version is no less shocking, but Garrone, unlike Saviano, keeps his cool—as he needs to, with five separate narratives to juggle. We get a pair of teen-agers who dream of becoming sadistic big shots, although the camera catches something instantly pathetic in their delirium. (Watch them standing on a lonely beach in their underpants, firing stolen guns at nothing at all.) We get a kid who carries drugs for the Camorra, the Neapolitan Mafia, the innocence seeping from him with every favor. Then, there are three men who look as if they could be related (it must be deliberate casting). One is a tailor who moonlights as a teacher for Chinese immigrant workers; another hands out money in the Mob-ruled warrens of a northern suburb; the third dumps toxic waste into the sump of

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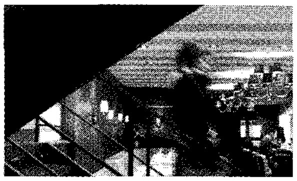
TABLES FOR TWO
L'ARTUSI



HONORÉ BROWN

228 W. 10th St. (212-255-5757)—In 1891, Pellegrino Artusi, at the age of seventy-one, having retired from the silk trade, published an exhaustive, droll cookbook spanning every region of his newly unified Italy, "Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well"—an Italian "Joy of Cooking," with attitude. (From the preface: "Cooking is a troublesome sprite. . . . I may discreetly assume that my dishes have been generally well received, and that to my great fortune few people, thus far, have cursed me for stomach aches or other phenomena that decency forbids me to mention.")

In adopting his name for their follow-up to Dell'Anima, the chef Gabe Thompson and the sommelier Joe Campanale portend substance and variety, home cooking for the soul. While the clever menu mirrors, if refractively, its namesake's philosophies, the décor has an identity crisis. A dimly lit splatter-painted gray brick wall gives way to a sort of Upper East Side dining corridor, with a Ralph Lauren Home-style wide-striped ceiling and red-chintz-and-ticking-stripe upholstery. In the back, a bright-white subway-tiled open kitchen is edged with a long marble bar, where diners are encouraged to watch the crudo apprentices in action. (Artusi: "Pity those ladies who receive guests in semi-darkness, and in whose homes you stumble into the furniture and know not where to put your hat.")

Artusi's improvisatory spirit is certainly evident in Thompson's modern-meets-classics roster of "medium plates." Among the pleasing crudos were pristine Nantucket Bay scallops, folded with creamy sweet *uni* and bitter flecks of preserved lemon; less successful was the tuna with beet cubes, too much mineral darkness in one bite. The *otoro* with *lardo* on mini-toast was fun, as were several sublimely rustic pastas, such as the *pizzoccheri*, buckwheat pasta ribbons baked with a salty mélange of sage, Fontina, and Brussels sprouts, and an exemplary spaghetti and meatballs. (Artusi: "Do not think for a moment that I would be so pretentious as to tell you how to make meatballs. This is a dish that everyone knows how to make, beginning with the jackass.")

There is much talk of indigestion in "Science in the Kitchen," and Thompson might do well to heed Artusi's guidance, as some of his dishes, though delicious—a perfectly rare "deckle" steak; rich *zeppole* stuffed with braised octopus—left one feeling as if a pound of butter had been consumed. But the last word should go to Artusi: "Passion, care, and precision of method will certainly suffice . . . I, after all, cannot presume to have reached the acme of perfection." (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $14-$24.)

—*Shauna Lyon*

the countryside. These are finely gauged performances (Salvatore Cantalupo's heartbreaking one, as the tailor, being the standout), but Garrone went one better by recruiting locals into the minor roles, and the whole project has a dangerously authentic smell. Yet the movie stirs beyond documentary, ending up as a controlled rumination on the cruelty of fate; most of the characters are as flies to wanton boys, and they don't come more wanton than the Camorra. In Italian (or, rather, Neapolitan).—*Anthony Lane* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

THE INTERNATIONAL

A Luxembourg-based outfit called I.B.B.C., and clearly modelled after the infamous Bank of Credit and Commerce International (B.C.C.I.), serves as a middleman in mayhem-producing arms deals and buys off or assassinates anyone who tries to investigate its criminal behavior. Yet two entirely virtuous people—an Interpol agent (Clive Owen) and a Manhattan assistant district attorney (Naomi Watts)—refuse to give up, and they chase the bad guys all over the world. Despite its fresh subject, there's nothing original in the form of this if-it's-Tuesday-this-must-be-Istanbul thriller, with its portentous globe-hopping and racing through colorful street bazaars. For those who like tony scenes of wealth, the movie offers amusingly austere impressions of high-style viciousness—men with closely cropped beards and perfectly tailored silver-gray suits meeting in circular, sparsely furnished conference rooms and climbing into shiny black Audis. Yet one can't help feeling that the visual panache of director Tom Tykwer is beside the point. The real-world bank story, it turns out, is about the banality of evil, not murder ordered at the highest levels. With Armin Mueller-Stahl.—*D.D.* (3/2/09) (In wide release.)

KATYŃ

Andrzej Wajda's stunning epic begins in September, 1939, on a bridge in central Poland. A group entering from one end flees the invading Germans; a group entering from the other flees the Soviets, and they mingle in abject confusion. Wajda's movie recounts the period in Polish life when the country's fate became a joke between Stalin and Hitler. Katyń was the name of the forest in the Soviet Union, near Smolensk, in which, in April, 1940, at least ten thousand captured Polish officers were murdered by the Soviet secret police, the N.K.V.D., along with another ten thousand or so Polish teachers, civil servants, and other members of the educated élite. At first the massacre was blamed (correctly) on the Soviets, but when the Red Army "liberated" Poland in 1944 and 1945, and local Communists backed by the Soviets took over, the blame was shifted to the Nazis, and Poles loyal to the new government had to accede to this extraordinary lie. Wajda goes back and forth between the sudden, stunning seizure and elimination of large groups and intimate moments of companionship among the families waiting for news—any news. The scenes are curt, decisive, and unsentimental to the point of bluntness. With Artur Żmijewski, as a captured officer whose diary serves as a narration. Adapted from the novel "Post-Mortem," by Andrzej Mularczyk. In Polish, Russian, and German.—*D.D.* (3/2/09) (Film Forum.)

MADEA GOES TO JAIL

Tyler Perry's alter ego, the housecoat-wearing, six-foot-six force of nature, Madea, returns in this hit-or-miss soap opera, the latest in a long string of hits from Perry's Atlanta movie factory. The plot concerns a sensitive district attorney (Derek Luke) who tries to help a heroin-addicted prostitute (Keshia Knight Pulliam) while his selfish, status-seeking fiancée fights him every step of the way. When Madea enters the fray (she doesn't serve much jail time), she forcefully delivers her usual no-nonsense advice and, as a comic tornado, gives the predictable melodrama some much needed energy. There's not much here that Perry hasn't done before, and he still has trouble blending comedy and drama engagingly (his films work only fitfully), but his imposing, cross-dressing creation is riveting. With Madea, he attains an undeniable cultural relevance that's both madcap and redemptive.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

MILK

Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

ONE P.M.

Late in 1968, Jean-Luc Godard came to the United States to direct "One American Movie," or "One A.M.," for public television; the film was produced—and filmed—by the great documentary director-cameramen Richard Leacock and D. A. Pennebaker. Godard staged docudramatic skits (such as Rip Torn, in a Confederate uniform, playacting for a classroom of students in Bedford-Stuyvesant), interviewed Eldridge Cleaver about movies, organized a backyard bull session with Tom Hayden ("Blood is gonna run all over this country") and had Torn perform Hayden's tape-recorded monologue, and interviewed a young liberal lawyer (Carol Bellamy) on Wall Street. Godard's meta-movie methods were daring but untethered; the anarchic realities he captured overflowed the confines of revolutionary doctrine, and he abandoned the footage. The film was edited by Pennebaker, who titled it "One Parallel Movie." Only the sequence in which the Jefferson Airplane wreak havoc in the streets of New York while playing—thrillingly—on the roof of a midtown hotel gains symbolic traction. Otherwise, the time-capsule grab bag mainly shows how hard it is even for a fast-working genius to film history on the wing without a high concept to refract it.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 7.)

PAUL BLART: MALL COP

Kevin James must be feeling the love now that his latest film—about an overweight security guard who encounters a bunch of hapless thieves holding hostage a crowd of shoppers at a West Orange, New Jersey, mall—has turned out to be a smash hit. The movie is divided into two parts: the first is a sitcom-like look at Paul Blart's home life (he's a single dad with a daughter); the second is a semi-inventive comic take on the "Die Hard" movies, as James uses his surprisingly spry bulk to rescue the hostages. The story stays in family-friendly territory (there are no raunchy jokes or lessons about conspicuous consumption), and most of the mindless nonsense of the script (which James co-wrote with Nick Bakay) passes pleasantly, thanks to the rotund sweetness of James's performance. Directed by Steve Carr.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE READER

The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or even improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

SONGWRITER

This freewheeling, sophisticated comedy from 1984, about how artists are driven to become con artists in order to survive, is a terrifically enjoyable movie. As the wily Doc Jenkins who turns to "mogulling," Willie Nelson is a country-music version of Alec Guinness's scalawag painter Gulley Jimson in "The Horse's Mouth." Working with a witty script by Bud Shrake, the director Alan Rudolph is able to bring out the scrounginess and the ribaldry of the down-home music scene; the picture offers a wide range of rowdy slapstick, some of which is fairly highbrow. The performers are up to everything that's handed to them. The cast includes the silver-bearded Kris Kristofferson, as a vain, happy sensualist; Lesley Ann Warren in a stunning performance as a sweet, insecure, boozing hysteric; Rip Torn, who makes everything he says sound mean and dirty; Melinda Dillon, who has a way of blending right in with the gags; Richard C. Sarafian (the director of "Vanishing Point") as a Nashville gangster entrepreneur; and Rhonda Dotson, a romantic comedienne with awesome poise.—*P.K.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 6 and March 10.)

TAKEN

Liam Neeson plays a divorced father and former C.I.A. employee, who lives in Los Angeles to be near his immensely annoying teen-age daughter (Maggie Grace). When she is kidnapped on a trip to Paris, he tracks her down, taking the opportunity to combine his two favorite cultural interests: tender paternal love and indiscriminate homicide. First, he slaughters the Albanians who stole her, before moving on to the Arabs who want to buy her, and you feel quite sure that he would, if required, slash and thump his way through the rest of the alphabet. For those with a taste for political allegory, there is something to ponder here, although the director, Pierre Morel, together with his producer (and co-writer) Luc Besson, takes things at such a clip that little room is left for contemplation. The result is unrelenting, improbable, and humorless; Neeson, as domineering as ever, shades his feats of aggression with a solemn gravity that they scarcely deserve, and anyone raised on "An American in Paris" will weep to think how far we have travelled from Gene Kelly. That was a fantasy of international ease; this is a bad dream of revenge. With Famke Janssen.—*A.L.* (2/2/09) (In wide release.)

TEETH

Mitchell Lichtenstein, in his feature-film début, taps into the primal male fear of emasculation with a biting indie horror comedy based on the vagina-dentata myth. Innocent Dawn (the prodigiously coy Jess Weixler) is a star speaker at her local Christian "Promise" meetings, where she preaches to adolescents the importance of chastity. Although her mother is sick and her hateful brother, Brad (the utterly creepy John Hensley), terrorizes her with lewd taunting, Dawn remains cheerful, and when she falls for the adorable Tobey (Hale Appleman), her journey toward self-discovery begins—to her horror and to the detriment of many men, including, hilariously, a borderline-lecherous gynecologist. While Lichtenstein does not shy from gory bloodletting, he maintains an even tone of parody, offering a fearsome nightmare for men and a droll, cathartic revenge scenario for women.—*Shauna Lyon* (Sunshine; March 6-7.)

TOKYO!
This three-part film, composed of half-hour segments set in the Japanese metropolis, directed by Michel Gondry, Leos Carax, and Bong Joon-ho, is an unfortunate triumph of intelligence over heart. Gondry's anecdote offers the most local color, featuring a comically struggling young filmmaker and his slacker girlfriend, in what begins as a sweet satire on the city's tight real-estate market and stringent job market (as shown in the rigorous test to which aspiring package-wrappers are subjected). The sketch veers off into a metaphorical special-effects dénouement that's as silly as it is offensive. Carax, who hasn't made a movie in a decade, comes back with "Merde," a political monster story that fuses Dostoyevsky's Underground Man with Quasimodo, "Beauty and the Beast," and contemporary terrorism. Denis Lavant valiantly throws himself into the role of a vengeful sewer-dwelling creature as the story careens from the slaughter of innocents to a courtroom circus and an execution. Carax's former poetic inventiveness seems hemmed in by doctrine (or just lack of practice); he appears mainly to enjoy flinging insults. Bong exercises his apocalyptic imagination in a trifle about a *hikikomori*, or agoraphobe, who is forced out of his cloistered life by an earthquake; though several images are striking, a gratuitous cyborg-centric conceit kills all feeling. The films in this overly calculated project seem to respond to little inner need on the filmmakers' part. In Japanese, French, and a made-up monster language.—*R.B.* (Sunshine Cinema.)

TWO LOVERS
If this really is the swan song of Joaquin Phoenix, as the actor has vowed, then it's a fine-looking swan to go out on. He plays Leonard, who lives in Brighton Beach with his parents, works in the family's dry-cleaning store, and seems not just troubled in mind but, as it were, only half-formed as an adult member of society. Not that this stops him from attracting the attention of beautiful women; first comes Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the daughter of his parents' friends, followed shortly by Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), whose apartment overlooks his own, and who can boast a range of perplexities almost as broad as his own, what with her weakness for drugs and her reliance on the wallet of a married man (Elias Koteas). James Gray's film observes Leonard as he seesaws between these two alliances; as late as the final scene, we cannot tell which way he will tip, still less whether his choice will make him happy ever after. The overall result is a cramped and distressing movie that is somehow eased and opened out by its rich soundtrack and, above all, by the grace of its compositions. With Isabella Rossellini as Leonard's long-suffering mother.—*A.L.* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

UNDERWORLD
Ben Hecht, who wrote the story and won an Oscar for it in 1927, objected to the way the director, Josef von Sternberg, embellished his characters with flamboyant touches, but the fusion of Hecht's hardboiled guys and molls and von Sternberg's otherworldly atmospherics makes this gangland tale of competing loyalties wonderfully entertaining. George Bancroft plays the crude but lionhearted bank robber Bull Weed; Evelyn Brent vamps her way through the role of his girl, Feathers McCoy; and Clive Brook achieves a glittering subtlety as Rolls Royce, the alcoholic lawyer Bull rescues from the gutter and makes his right-hand man. When Bull gets sent away for murdering his criminal rival, "Buck" Mulligan (Fred Kohler), for assaulting Feathers, she and Rolls Royce must fight their romantic impulses. There are some perfect scenes, such as an underworld ball that ends with tuxedoed thugs trudging through drifts of party paper. All gangster films have stolen something from this one, whether it's the billboard telling the antiheroes "The City Is Yours" or the shoot-out that shatters the bricks of Bull Weed's hideout.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; March 5.)

Also Playing

HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU: In wide release. **THE PINK PANTHER 2:** In wide release. **ROBERT BLECKER WANTS ME DEAD:** Cinema Village. **STREET FIGHTER: THE LEGEND OF CHUN-LI:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Rip Torn. March 5 at 7: "Maidstone" (1970, Norman Mailer). ♦ March 5 at 9:30 and March 8 at 6:15: "Payday" (1973, Daryl Duke). ♦ March 6 at 7 and March 9 at 9: "Coming Apart" (1969, Moses Milton Ginsberg). The March 9 screening will be followed by a Q. and A. with the director. ♦ March 6 at 9:30 and March 10 at 7: "Songwriter" (†). ♦ March 7 at 4:30: "One P.M." (†). ♦ March 7 at 6:30: "Sweet Bird of Youth" (1962, Richard Brooks). ♦ March 7 at 9: "Forty Shades of Blue" (2005, Ira Sachs), followed by a discussion with the director). ♦ March 8 at 4: "Beach Red" (1967, Cornel Wilde). ♦ March 8 at 8:30: "The Limit" (1957, Karl Malden). ♦ March 9 at 7: "Beyond the Law" (1968, Mailer). ♦ March 10 at 9: "Tropic of Cancer" (1970, Joseph Strick). ♦ "Goethe Institut Presents." March 5 at 7:30 and 9: "People on Sunday" (1929, Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer). ♦ "Essential Cinema." March 7 at 5: Short-film program, including "The Old House, Passing" (1968, Larry Jordan). ♦ March 8 at 5: Short-film program, including "Listen to Britain" (1941, Humphrey Jennings). ♦ March 8 at 7:30: "Rapt" (1934, Dimiti Kirsanoff).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Focus on IFC Films." March 6 at 6:50: "Hunger" (2008, Steve McQueen). ♦ March 6 at 9:15: "The Chaser" (2008, Na Hing-Jin; in Korean). ♦ March 7 at 9:30: "I'm Gonna Explode" (2008, Gerardo Naranjo; in Spanish). ♦ March 7 at 7:15: "Summer Hours" (2008, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ March 8 at 2: "Quiet Chaos" (2008, Antonio Luigi Grimaldi; in Italian).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Breadlines and Champagne," Depression-era movies. March 4 at 1:20, 4:35, and 8: "The Mouthpiece" (1932, Elliott Nugent and James Flood). ♦ March 4 at 3, 6:15, and 9:40: "Counsellor at Law" (1933, William Wyler). The 6:15 screening will be introduced by Catherine Wyler, the director's daughter). ♦ March 5 at 1, 3:55, 6:50, and 9:50: "Upperworld" (1934, Roy Del Ruth). ♦ March 5 at 2:30, 5:25, and 8:25: "Night World" (1932, Hobart Henley). ♦ In revival. March 6-12 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Leave Her to Heaven" (1945, John Stahl).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"*Film Comment* Selects." March 4 at 4: "À l'Aventure" (2009, Jean-Claude Brisseau; in French). ♦ March 5 at 7: "The Hurt Locker" (2009, Kathryn Bigelow). ♦ "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 5 at 8: "Paris 36" (2009, Christophe Barratier). This screening will take place at Alice Tully Hall. ♦ March 6 at 1 and March 7 at 6:35: "The Girl from Monaco" (2008, Anne Fontaine). ♦ March 6 at 3:30 and March 8 at 6: "Versailles" (2008, Pierre Schoeller). ♦ March 6 at 6:20, March 8 at 8:45, and March 9 at 3:30: "Change of Plans" (2009, Danièle Thompson). ♦ March 6 at 8:45 and March 8 at 12:30: "Séraphine" (2008, Martin Provost). ♦ March 7 at 1:30 and March 9 at 8:45: "The Beaches of Agnès" (2008, Agnès Varda). ♦ March 7 at 4:10 and March 9 at 1 and 6:15: "With a Little Help from Myself" (2008, François Dupeyron). ♦ March 7 at 9 and March 11 at 1:30: "Eden Is West" (2009, Costa-Gavras). ♦ March 8 at 3:30 and March 10 at 1: "The Joy of Singing" (2008, Ilan Duran Cohen). ♦ March 10 at 3:30 and 9:10: "The Girl on the Train" (2009, André Téchiné). ♦ March 10 at 6:15: "Mesrine Part 1" (2008, Jean-François Richet).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 31: The films of Jacques Doillon. March 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Hussy" (1979; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 6 at 7: "With a Little Help from Myself" (2008, François Dupeyron). ♦ March 6 and March 10 at 9:30: "Bellamy" (2009, Claude Chabrol). ♦ March 7 at 1:30: "Versailles" (2008, Pierre Schoeller). ♦ March 7 at 4: "Séraphine" (2008, Martin Provost). ♦ March 7 at 7: "Change of Plans" (2009, Danièle Thompson). ♦ March 8 at 1:30: "The Girl from Monaco" (2008, Anne Fontaine). ♦ March 8 at 4: "Eden Is West" (2009, Costa-Gavras). ♦ March 8 at 6:45 and March 9 at 9: "The Girl on the Train" (2009, André Téchiné). ♦ March 9 at 7: "The Apprentice" (2008, Samuel Collardey). ♦ March 10 at 7: "The Other One" (2008, Patrick Mario Bernard and Pierre Trividic). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." March 6-7: "The Fly" (†). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. March 10 at 8: "Arguing the World" (1998, Joseph Dorman).

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St., at Thompson St. (212-796-0741)—"Deeper Into Movies." March 9 at 8:30: "Scenes from a Marriage" (1974, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." All films are silent. March 4 at 1:30: "Beau Brummel" (1924, Harry Beaumont). ♦ March 5 at 1:30: "Underworld" (†). ♦ March 6 at 1:30: "The Freshman" (1925, Sam Taylor). ♦ Special screenings. March 4 at 6, March 5 and 9 at 5, March 6 at 8:30, and March 7-8 at 3: "The French Connection" (1971, William Friedkin). ♦ "Filmmaker in Focus: Ramin Bahrani." March 4 at 6:15 and March 7 at 6: "Man Push Cart" (2005; in English and Urdu). ♦ March 4 at 8:15 and March 6 at 6: "Chop Shop" (2007). ♦ March 5 at 7: "Goodbye Solo" (2008). ♦ The films of Ivan Passer. March 6 at 6, March 7 at 2, March 8 at 4, and March 9 at 5: "Intimate Lighting" (1965; in Czech). ♦ March 6 at 8 and March 8 at 6: "Cutter's Way" (1981). The March 6 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ March 7 at 4: "Born to Win" (1971). ♦ March 8 at 1:30: "Law and Disorder" (1974). ♦ March 8 at 6:30: "Golden Sixties" (2009; in Czech). ♦ March 9 at 7: A discussion with Passer and the documentary filmmaker Jan Sikl, featuring a screening of "Daddy and Lilly Marlene" (2007, Sikl; in Czech).

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-712-7237)—"Silent Clowns," two films starring Raymond Griffith. March 8 at 2: "Hands Up!" (1925, Clarence Badger) and "His Foothill Folly" (1917, Reggie Morris).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." March 6 at 9:30: "The Young Lions" (1958, Edward Dmytryk), introduced by Foster Hirsch.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." March 6-7: "Teeth" (†), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

READINGS AND TALKS

LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM
The Dublin-based journalist Bill Barich (who wrote extensively for this magazine from 1980 to 1999) gives a preview of "A Pint of Plain," his

survey of the state of authentic Irish pubs, which is due out on St. Patrick's Day. (97 Orchard St., in the basement. For more information, call 212-982-8420. March 4 at 6:30.)

192 BOOKS
The artist Tom Sachs talks about his work. (192 Tenth Ave., between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. March 5 at 7.)

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
The Writers Studio Reading Series presents Major Jackson, Beena Kamlani, Jim Shepard, Joan Silber, Tree Swenson, and Rosanna Warren, in a celebration of the Pushcart Press. (55 Washington Sq. S. For more information, call 212-255-7075. March 6 at 7.)

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
Nation Books brings together Naomi Klein, Barbara Ehrenreich, Bill Fletcher, Jr., Christopher Hayes, and Joseph Stiglitz for a discussion about the economic crisis and President Obama's recovery plan. (2 W. 64th St. No tickets necessary. March 6 at 8.)

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
Leonard Lopate talks with the novelist Peter Carey about Carey's latest work, "His Illegal Self." (Grand Army Plaza. March 7 at 4. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"THE ORCHID SHOW"
The New York Botanical Garden's annual display, featuring thousands of the sensual and colorful flowers, continues through April 12. The theme this year is "Brazilian Modern." (Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700.)

"CHOCOLATE CHIP CHAMBER MUSIC"
Parents know that they can get a reluctant toddler to eat a nutritious dinner by promising something sweet at the end of the meal. So it goes at this Park Slope series for the under-six set; a fresh-baked chocolate-chip cookie is given out after each performance. A full program of mostly classical compositions (pared down into bite-size, two-minute passages) is built around a story line that kids can follow. For the final concerts of the 2008-2009 season, the CCMC presents the Sweet Treat Trio (Gabriela Martinez on piano, Julia MacLaine on cello, and Anna Elashvili on violin), which will play music to accompany an interactive children's activity based loosely on the classic board game Candy Land. (Old First Reformed Church, 126 Seventh Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn. For more information, visit www.chocolatechipmusic.org, or call 718-638-8300. March 7 at 10 and 11:30 A.M. and March 8 at 4, with a sing-along session beginning thirty minutes before the start of each concert.)

"BRAINWAVE"
The Rubin Museum of Art's annual festival exploring the mind through art, music, and meditation brings in Miranda July, who will talk with the neuropsychologist George Bonanno about her film "Me and You and Everyone We Know" and her short-story collection "No One Belongs Here More Than You." (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. March 7 at 6.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The sprawling **Armory Show** (March 5-8) has expanded this year, adding works by established modern artists to its usual contemporary-art offerings and taking over not one but two piers (Nos. 92 and 94) on the West Side. A range of ancillary shows (such as the VOLTA NY show, dedicated to emerging artists) and studio tours around town are added attractions. (Twelfth Ave. at 55th St. 212-645-6440. For more information, see www.armoryartsweek.com.) ♦ American art from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fills the galleries at the big houses this week. **Christie's** sale of American paintings (March 5) is well endowed with Impressionist and post-Impressionist works, such as a soft-hued interior scene, "Impressionist Figure," by Charles Webster Hawthorne. Western art is also well represented, with majestic landscapes, portraits of Native Americans (including two by Henry Balink), and even a small equestrian sculpture of John Wayne as Rooster Cogburn, the hard-living U.S. marshal he portrayed in "True Grit." (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** auction of American paintings (March 4) is led by a series of warm, sunny Western scenes by Oscar E. Berninghaus, from the collection of Bank of America. The following week, the house offers a foretaste of its high-stakes May auction of contemporary works (March 10). A charcoal figure by de Kooning (ca. 1979) appears to be dancing, while in a 2005 painting by Shi Xinning (from his "Utopian Stories" series) Mao joins the Fab Four in an ironic, hyperrealist group portrait. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

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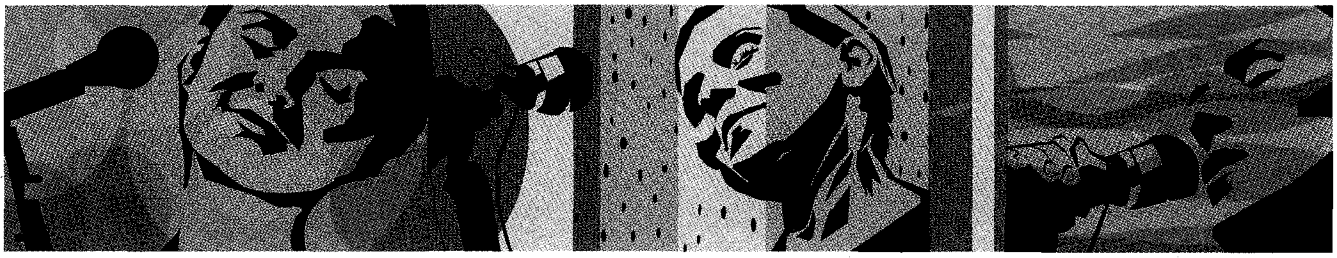
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



KIM DEMARCO

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
BRONX CHEER
March 11-17

As teen-agers in the Bronx in the nineteen-fifties, the twin brothers George and Mike Kuchar made a series of outrageous Super-8 parodies of the era's Hollywood epics (such as "The Naked and the Nude"). Anthology Film Archives, which supervised the preservation of these early collaborations, presents ten of them, including "Born of the Wind," about a scientist who falls in love with a mummy. (212-505-5181.)

THE THEATRE
OH SO UNPRETTY
March 13

Neil LaBute's "Reasons to Be Pretty," which premièred last year at the Lucille Lortel, transfers to Broadway's Lyceum Theatre. Marin Ireland, Steven Pasquale, Piper Perabo, and Thomas Sadoski star in the comic drama; Terry Kinney directs. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TWILIGHT
March 25-May 9

An innovative Robert Lepage production of Wagner's "Ring" cycle comes to the Met beginning in 2010, but this season is the last chance to see the four operas in Otto Schenk's traditionalist stagings; such singers as Waltraud Meier, René Pape, and Plácido Domingo are featured. (212-362-6000.)

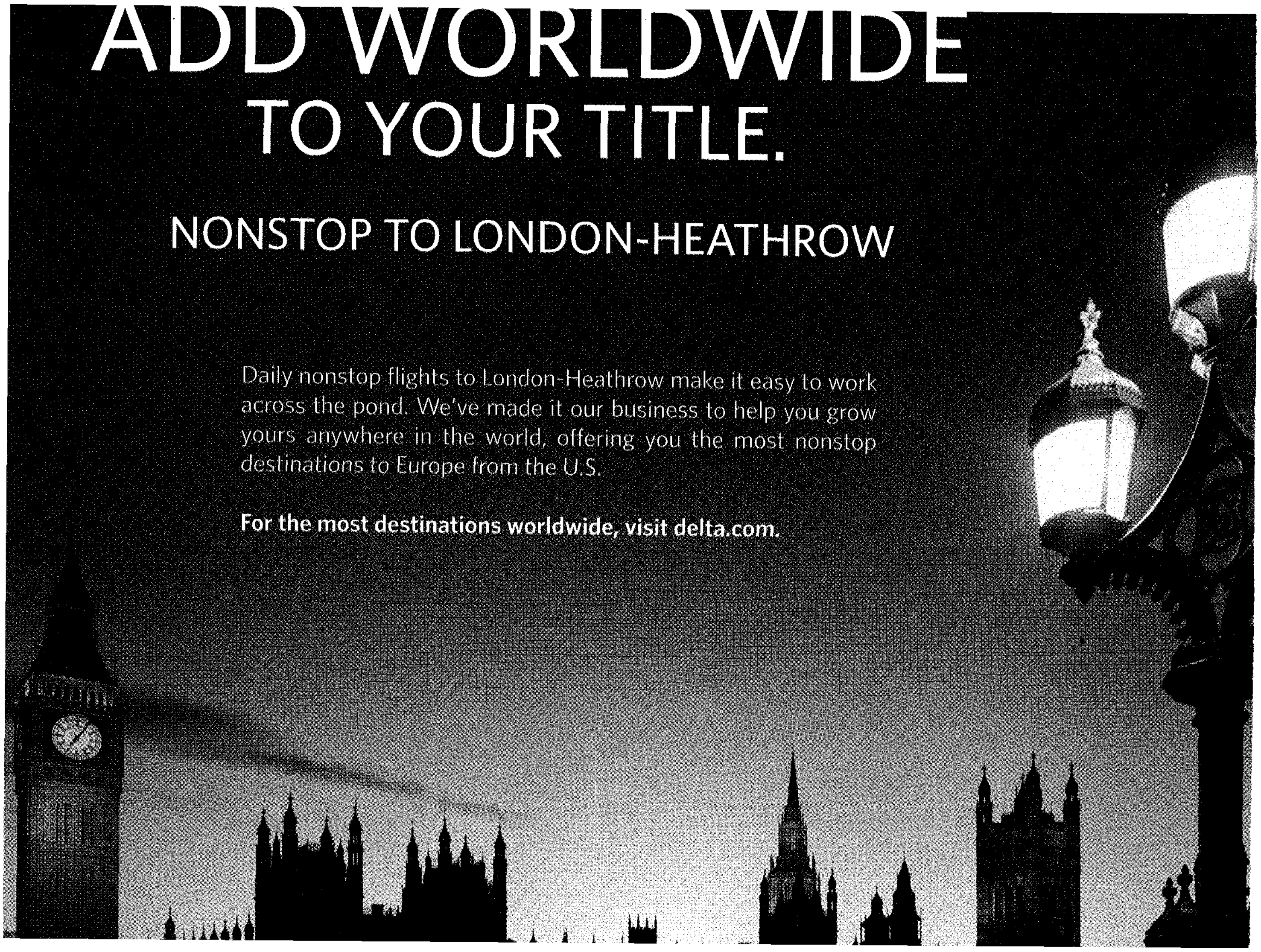
NIGHT LIFE
ITALIAN ICE
March 28

Emiliana Torrini, an Icelandic singer-songwriter of Italian extraction, isn't well known here, but her work is: she co-wrote Kylie Minogue's hit "Slow" and sang "Gollum's Song" at the end of "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers." She appears at the Hiro Ballroom. (800-745-3000.)

ART
BEST WESTERN
March 29-June 8

For some hundred and fifty years, photographers—from Carleton E. Watkins to Joel Sternfeld—have found a muse in the terrain west of the Mississippi. More than a hundred and twenty works on the subject by seventy artists will be shown in "Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West," at MOMA. (212-708-9400.)

Emiliana Torrini, at the Hiro Ballroom.



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THE
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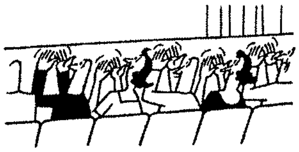
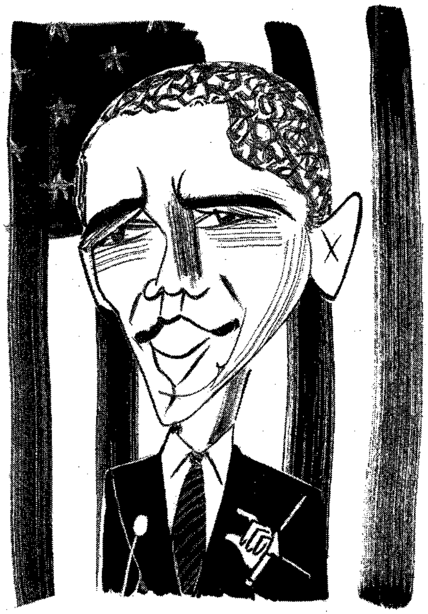
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
TAKING THE JOB



A politician ascending to the pinnacle of American power receives custody of the Presidency and its powers on January 20th, but he *becomes* President over time, through a testing procession of civic rituals and occurrences planned and unplanned: his announcement of candidacy; his acquisition and acceptance of his party's nomination; his campaign debate appearances; his electoral mandate; his Cabinet and staff choices; his Inaugural; his first full-scale news conference; his first trip overseas on Air Force One; his first crisis in office. Barack Obama—whose first crisis took hold before his election and dwarfs any of his predecessors' since Franklin D. Roosevelt's, which it chillingly resembles—performed another of those rituals last week. In his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Obama took full possession of his job and his role.

For an hour, Obama spoke with a measured urgency that occasionally overrode even the customary bobbings up and down of the Speaker, the Vice-President, and the audience. (Congressional standing ovations: America's answer to North Korean calisthenics.) The President began by casting the crisis in human terms ("the college acceptance letter your child had to put back in the envelope"), offering reassurance ("America will emerge stronger than before"), reviewing the immediate goals of the economic-stimulus bill he had signed a week earlier, and explaining why the government's hugely expensive effort to re-start the flow of credit is an absolute necessity ("It's not about helping banks, it's about helping people"). He then sketched the outlines of a program for change as ambitious as any President has proposed since this one was a toddler: first, a new energy economy, based on a surge of public investment in renewable technologies and including, crucially, a cap on carbon pollution; second, the long-postponed comprehensive reform of our health-care system, aimed not only at bringing "quality, affordable health care to every American" but also at lightening its burden on American business; and, third, an expansion of educational quality and opportunity such that "every child has access to a complete and competitive education, from the day they are born to the day they begin a career."



For some thirty years, the American political conversation has been dominated by a strain of ideological conservatism that wields market fundamentalism as a sword and cultural populism as a shield. In this speech, the President began to take up the task of reintroducing the public to what once was called, and one day may again be called, liberalism. He would have been perfectly within his rights to focus blame for the nation's condition on his predecessor and his predecessor's party, but he made a different choice. (The closest he came was when he said, "A surplus became an excuse to transfer wealth to the wealthy instead of an opportunity to invest in our future.") Instead, he spoke of "we"—of a common responsibility for the past and the future alike. He was able to anticipate and soothe the reflexive emotions of his opponents while explaining, in undogmatic yet value-laden terms, why the times demand a decisive departure from an essentially amoral exaltation of individual success. "Dropping out of high school is no longer an option," he said. "It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country." That admonition, which won applause from both sides of the aisle, was not directed solely, or even primarily, at the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

young and underprivileged. It was a metaphorical call to duty and a redefinition of patriotism.

During the speech, CNN equipped a roomful of Democrats and Republicans with dials to turn this way or that. Though sometimes the red and blue lines crowded each other at the top of the resulting graph, at other times no lines at all were visible. They were literally off the charts. In a followup CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll, ninety-two per cent of viewers had a positive reaction to the speech; eighty-two per cent said they supported its proposals. The science of this sort of thing may be doubted, especially as a predictor of future opinion. But politicians tend to take notice.

The opposition response attracted more attention than usual. Bobby Jindal has been cast as the Republican equivalent of Obama. A decade younger than the President and from a comparable background (his parents immigrated from India), he is reputed to possess a command of policy detail rivalling Bill Clinton's. Even so, Jindal's delivery was received kindly by no one; the only controversy was about whose it more nearly resembled, that of the late Mr. Rogers or that of Kenneth, the page on the television comedy "30 Rock." But what was truly pitiful was what he said, not how he said it. Understandably (he *is* the governor of Louisiana), Jindal built his talk around Hurricane Katrina; incredibly, the lesson he drew was that the national government tries to do too much. The emotional heart of his speech—an anecdote about how, during the hurricane, he and a local sheriff defied "some bureaucrat" who refused to let volunteers launch their boats to rescue victims on rooftops because the volunteers didn't have the proper paperwork—was quickly shown to be rather less heroic than it sounded.

Jindal dismissed Obama's stimulus bill by harping on its funding of "something called volcano monitoring," which allowed him to venture a feeble joke about "the eruption of spending in Washington, D.C." The stimulus does in fact allocate a hundred and forty million dollars—less than 0.0002 per cent of its total—for U.S. Geological Survey facilities and equipment, with a tenth of that amount aimed at predicting events like the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, which, in 1980, killed fifty-seven people and caused billions of dollars in damage. Coming from the governor of a state whose suffering from a natural disaster was first compounded by the incompetence and the indifference of a Republican Administration in Washington and then relieved, however inadequately, by more than a hundred billion dollars in federal outlays, this was stupefying. Jindal's mockery recalled Sarah Palin's campaign-trail ridicule of fruit-fly research, a key tool in the study of human genetics. Interestingly, one of the volcanoes currently causing geologists the most worry is Mt. Redoubt, about a hundred miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. Those 2012 primary debates should be fun.

Two days later, the President unveiled his budget proposal, which put to rest any doubts about his seriousness. Paul Krugman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist and *Times* columnist, who has been among the doubters, was convinced. "President Obama's new budget represents a huge break, not just with the policies of the past eight years, but with policy trends over the past thirty years," Krugman wrote. "If he can get anything like the plan he announced on Thursday through Congress, he will set America on a fundamentally new course." A big if. But we finally have a plan, and a President.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

SHOE LEATHER
ROID WARRIORS

For Alex Rodriguez, we now know, the early years of this decade, when he was pumping himself full of Primobolan, seemed like a "different culture," a mini sixties revival without much oversight. "It was such a loosey-goosey era," he said in his televised confession, lips quivering. Hard as it may be to believe, he wasn't entirely full of it. "Even in our own newspaper, back then, I got a lot of 'Not another steroid story' looks from people," Teri Thompson, an editor at the *News*, said the other day, during a brief lull between the latest A-Rod follow-up and the start of Barry Bonds's perjury trial. "Everyone has kind of come around to the fact that this is a huge story of our time. But it was a lonely beat out there for a couple of years, anyway."

Thompson, who grew up in Arkansas in the sixties, and took a mid-career sabbatical to earn a law degree, is the media's premier steroids watchdog, having presided over the *News*' sports investigative unit, or I-Team, since 2000. She now has three reporters at her disposal, and deploys them widely in pursuit of all things drug-related. (Their stories are typically accompanied by a syringe graphic.) At a time when investigative journalism is coming under assault, the I-Team makes an unlikely inspiration for would-be Woodwards and Bernsteins.

"This is Jose's original manuscript, before the lawyers got hold of it," Thompson said, referring to Jose Canseco's best-selling "Juiced," which is often credited with exposing the so-called "steroid era." In the version on Thompson's desk, its title was "The Chemist." On a nearby bookshelf, she had a "Mustache of Justice" coffee mug, featuring a likeness of Representative Henry Waxman, who questioned Canseco at congressional steroid hearings in 2005.

Nathaniel Vinton, the newest member of the I-Team, took a seat next to Thompson and recalled his initiation into the beat, a year ago. "I flew straight to the first hearing on Capitol Hill," he said. "And then went straight from there to seedy Pasadena, Texas, for, like, a month."

"Nate almost got us killed there," Thompson said. "We were in this rental car with a G.P.S., and we were trying to figure out where Andy Pettitte's father lived. So we were in this cul-de-sac kind of place where these big houses are all stuck together, and Nate pulls over. I'm like, 'Look, people have seen us driving around this block forty times. I'm from the South. They'll come out with a gun any second.' All of a sudden, these three guys from three separate houses come out toward our car, and I'm like, 'Go, go, go!'"

"It was really sketchy," Vinton said.

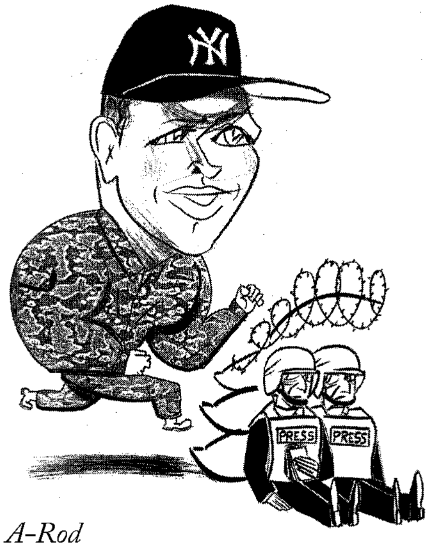
Thompson went on, "I have a relative who works at the D.E.A. He was like, 'You have no idea—these steroid people are dangerous.' You know, he listens on a wire. He's like, 'They're talking about you.'"

The other two I-Team members, Michael O'Keeffe and Christian Red, joined the conversation. Red is the I-Team's foreign correspondent. He has been dispatched to the Dominican Republic more than a dozen times, as well as to Venezuela and Panama, to the home towns of Latin-American ballplayers, where drug enforcement is more lax. "The diciest was the plane from Mérida to Caracas," he said. "Two weeks later, the same plane I was on crashed into a mountain. Everybody died."

"It reminds you, even though it's sports reporting, of how dangerous it can be," Thompson said. "What about your drug deal?" she asked Red, who had recently returned from Santo Domingo, where he went undercover and purchased A-Rod's favored meds.

"It was an edgier part of town," he said. "This guy just got in the car with us."

"People are always asking, 'Where's your steroids?'" Thompson said, as Vinton reached for an accordion file and began pulling out bags of seized drug labels and boxes obtained from a Deep Throat involved in the F.B.I.'s Operation Equine, back in the early nineties. "We have the ephedra samples, too," O'Keeffe said, prompting Thompson to open a drawer and retrieve a bottle of Xenadrine, a supplement that the pitcher Steve Bechler had been taking before he died of heatstroke, in 2003.



A-Rod

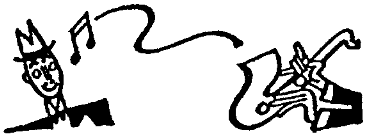
O'Keeffe is a former crime reporter, and he looks the part: long hair, goatee. "It's just a little more specialized," he said of his I-Team work. "Instead of the daily diet of murder and mayhem, it's, you know, sports, murder, and mayhem. People always say to me, 'You have a great job, you get to go to all these games.' And I go, 'No, I don't. I spend more time in courthouses than in locker rooms.' When we walk into the locker room, people will say, 'What are *you* doing here?'"

"'What player are you here to expose?'" Red said.

On a dry-erase board behind O'Keeffe's head, Thompson had scrawled a quote from the newspaper baron Lord Northcliffe: "News is what somebody somewhere is trying to suppress. The rest is advertising." There was an arrow connecting the word "somebody" to the name of the lawyer Rusty Hardin. His client Roger Clemens, the I-Team's sources say, could be indicted for perjury sometime this spring.

—*Ben McGrath*

DRIVE-BY DEPT.
LISTENING PARTY



Lakeside Lounge, on Avenue B, is known for many things: close quarters, cheap drinks, a photo booth, but most of all for its jukebox, which is full of raw R. & B., country, and early rock and roll. Last Monday afternoon, a short man in his sixties wearing oversized sunglasses and a black fedora cocked his ear toward the speaker overhead. "Joe Turner," he said. "Big Joe."

The song was "Honey Hush," a No. 1 R. & B. hit in 1953 for the Kansas City blues shouter. The man was Van Morrison, the Irish singer and songwriter, who was in town to play a pair of shows that week at the WaMu Theatre, at Madison Square Garden. The concerts were recitals of an old record, the 1968 album "Astral Weeks." But Morrison wanted to talk about even older records. "There was a place in Belfast called Atlantic Records," he said, his accent strong, his speaking voice lighter than his singing voice. "They imported the stuff from here, actually: jazz records and blues records. I'd go with my father from when I was three."

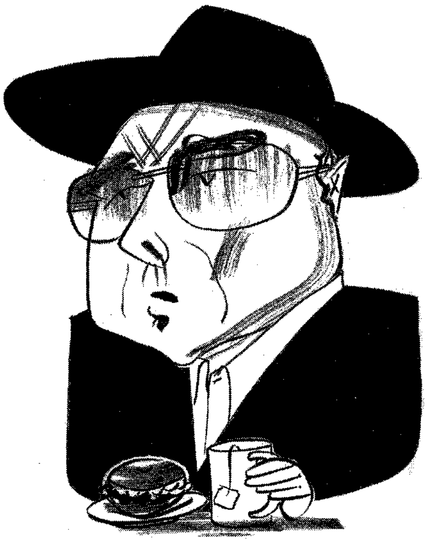
Joe Turner had stopped coming out of the jukebox. Now it was the founding fathers of rock and roll, in quick succession: Jerry Lee Lewis singing "Sixty Minute Man," Chuck Berry with "Tulane," Bo Diddley's "Dearest Darling," Little Richard on "Rip It Up." Morrison acknowledged each song with a nod. He looked slimmer than he has in the past, and he had long red hair of a hue reminiscent of Sumner Redstone. He sipped tea from a mug, and his press agent brought him a bagel with tuna salad. "The first Little Richard song I heard was 'Tutti Frutti,'" he said. "No, it was the one from the movie 'The Girl Can't Help It.' Little Richard was doing rhythm and blues, but with horns," Morrison went on. "It was different than Elvis Presley, and so I preferred it. Why would you like Elvis if you had the real stuff? I also preferred Carl Perkins and Gene Vincent. Vincent was different. He was rock and roll, dangerous."

Morrison mentioned Wynonie Harris, the ribald singer of the late forties and early fifties known as Mr. Blues: "I heard one of his on the radio, on a daytime show. Someone probably played it by accident." He held forth on Leadbelly: "He did everything from children's songs to cowboy songs to show tunes." He talked about the blind harpist Sonny Terry (the first record he ever bought was one of Terry's), the powerhouse vocalist Bobby Bland, and the skiffle pioneer Lonnie Donegan. When someone grouped Donegan with other practitioners of "pre-Beatles rock and roll," Morrison pulled up short.

"That's a cliché," he said, adjusting his sunglasses. "I don't think 'pre-Beatles' means anything, because there was stuff before them. Over here, you have a different slant. You measure things in terms of the Beatles. We don't think music started there. *Rolling Stone* magazine does, because it's their mythology. The Beatles were peripheral. If you had more knowledge about music, it didn't really mean anything. To me, it was meaningless."

Behind Morrison, the press agent was miming a "cut" signal, slicing the air in front of his throat with his hand. He was worried about rush-hour traffic—more specifically, about asking Morrison to sit in the car in rush-hour traffic. "I'm good for more," Morrison told him, and additional bills were fed into the jukebox. Fats Domino, the subject of Morrison's highest-charting single, "Domino," came on with "Careless Love," his trademark rolling piano already in place in 1951. "I never played piano myself," Morrison said. "There was a small organ that I used to play in the early sixties, but I don't think we could afford a piano."

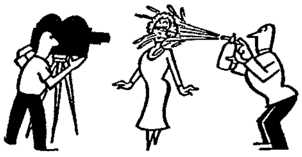
Morrison—now forty years and nearly forty albums into a solo career—said that he rarely goes to see young bands. "I've seen all the people I wanted to see," he said. "Ray Charles loads of times, James Brown lots of times, Mose Allison, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf. Why do I need to keep finding new bands when I have the originals?"


Van Morrison

On Monday night, Morrison will be the musical guest for the première of Jimmy Fallon's late-night TV program. He had not previously heard of Fallon, whose inexperience as a talk-show host he found appealing. "I wouldn't think he would be so in-a-box," Morrison said. The music wound down. Sam Cooke sang "Mean Old World." Morrison stood and went out past the jukebox.

—*Ben Greenman*

THE PICTURES VERNACULAR



Movie speak: the way people talk on the sets of movies. As in "Get me an apple" (*apple box:* a box used to support a prop, a light, or a diminutive actor). *Tony Bill:* the producer of "The Sting" and the director of "Five Corners" and "Flyboys," who, twelve years ago, got the idea of putting together a lexicon of movie-set lingo. "There's a culture of the set that never gets written about," he said recently. *Gobo:* an object used to block the light; it was one of the first terms that Bill learned, in 1963, on the set of "Come Blow Your Horn," in which he played Frank Sinatra's little brother. Other good ones: *Honeywagon,* the bathroom trailer; *Jane Russell,* a shot of a woman framed across the chest.

David Schwab, Judy Kuhn: a screenwriter and a Broadway actress and singer, who offered to throw a book party, filled with movie people, for Bill in their apartment. *Tribeca:* the neighborhood where the party was held. *Baby:* a light. *Love:* electricity ("Gimme some love"). *Lamp down:* to replace a lamp with one of a lower wattage. The apartment was lit with low lights and candles. *Cucoloris:* an object used to break the light into patterns. Some tall lilies in a vase did this (see also *dingle,* and *brancholoris*). *Lunch:* a meal served on the set (day or night)—salami, a cheese plate, and cauliflower bruschetta.

Rhubarb: background noise, like "watermelon, watermelon"—what extras say to create the sound of conversation. The partygoers were all discussing the Oscars. Bill on the subject: "What annoys me is when somebody will report, 'The Academy snubbed some performer'—as if people got together at a party and said, 'Let's all *not* vote for Clint Eastwood this year.'" A guest summarizing his latest script: "It's an irreverent comedy about a guy whose job it is to find other people's dead relatives." Or the book scout Maria Campbell saying, "I work with publishers in fourteen countries, and sometimes the most foreign country is L.A."

Fifty-fifty: a shot of two actors in profile. For example, the screenwriter Guy Gallo ("Under the Volcano") talking with the producer Doug Claybourne ("North Country") about the Christian Bale meltdown, triggered after a crew member failed to *clear the eyeline:*

GALLO: I'm actually on Bale's side on this. A professional *grip* [a rigger] knows you don't walk through the sightline.

CLAYBOURNE: Those guys should know that from Day One. The three most important things in making a movie? Performance, performance, performance.

Hoot: a subtle turn of the head to the side, named for the Western actor Hoot Gibson; this could have applied to the director Ulu Grosbard, who was standing nearby, listening in.

Manmaker: any device (*pancake, quarter apple*) used to make an actor taller. The casting director Yôko Narahashi ("Babel") explained that in Japan the term is *sessue,* for Sessue Hayakawa, the star of "The Bridge on the River Kwai" ("We say, '*Sessue!,*' which means 'Raise him up!' "). *Piece of business:* an action taken to make an actor appear engrossed. Bob Balaban (who could have used a manmaker) was busily thumbing through a copy of Bill's book. "I still have a great deal of trouble knowing who the *best boy* is," he said. (The second-most-important grip.) *Fly in:* to bring something, including oneself, to the set, and what people were hoping James Franco would do. (He was stuck in a creative-writing class uptown.)

Gag: a stunt or "custom contrivance." Never a joke. For example, the speech that Bill's wife, Helen, made—"Thank you all for coming in support of Tony's book!"—followed by Bill's heartfelt reading of a piece he'd written about meeting Cary Grant: "It was, as we say in our business, a movie-star entrance. . . . One second an ordinary white door, the next, well . . . Cary Grant."

Hair in the gate: the discovery of a problem on the set. For example, when someone put down a drink on the Steinway grand during Bill's reading, and Kuhn had to dash over to move it to a low table. (*Gary Coleman:* a short C-stand, around twenty inches high; named for the child star.) *Golden hour:* a time, favored by directors, when the sun is low on the horizon. *Horace McMahon:* an awkward way of getting up out of a sitting position (required for getting up off the couch, once used in Schwab's father's psychoanalysis practice). *Abby Singer:* the second-to-last shot of the day; a few female guests coming to the realization that James Franco wasn't going to show ("I'm very disappointed in James"). *Martini:* the last shot of the day (Bill taking off his glasses). *Moving on:* the announcement that it's time to move to the next scene or set. *We're on the wrong set:* according to Bill, "just another, cuter way to say *moving on.*"

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

REUNIONS
LADIES' NIGHT

A few weeks ago at McSorley's, the tavern in the East Village, a party of a dozen or so came in and settled at a pocked oak table. They exchanged pleasantries and business cards. Soon, ale appeared. After a few minutes, a woman with thick gray hair and long, ringless fingers lifted a mug.

"To Lilly Ledbetter!" she said.

"Yes!"

"To equal pay!"

Someone whispered, "Should we wait until after we order our food to say anything?"

The members of the group were mostly women, and mostly lawyers, as was their guest of honor, Karen DeCrow, who had proposed the toast. Twenty-nine years ago, DeCrow, along with Faith Seidenberg, a fellow board member of the National Organization for Women, sued McSorley's—which for more than a century had greeted female visitors with the clanging of a fight bell and swift expulsion—under the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Now DeCrow, who practices civil-rights law in Onondaga County, was revisiting McSorley's for the first time. The outing was merry, but tinged with uncertainty. As the incognito closing of a historical loop, it was akin to Franklin McCain's casually popping into the Greensboro Woolworth's for a slice of toast. "What I remember was a huge bar," DeCrow said, surveying the room. "Of course, that's because I was frightened. It's not huge."

By 1969, a public accommodation such as McSorley's could not deny a person entry based on his religion or his race. The point of DeCrow and Seidenberg's lawsuit was to add gender to the list of protected categories. Initially, they had targeted the Hotel Syracuse, upstate, which barred unescorted women from its Rainbow Lounge. "They sold lottery tickets, so I went in and the bartender wouldn't sell one to me," DeCrow recalled. "An assistant to the state Attorney General said, 'Darling, you want a lottery ticket? I'll buy you one.' "

The women hoped that a run-in at McSorley's—motto: "Good Ale, Raw Onions, and No Ladies"—would galvanize the case. An old tale had it that a woman named Mother Fresh Roasted, a peanut peddler whose husband had succumbed to a lizard bite during the Spanish-American War, was occasionally permitted entry, but even *men* of a certain sort elicited a surly greeting. "How much beer do you think a fancy fellow from uptown will drink?" Harry Kirwan, the manager, asked a reporter from the *Times* in 1954.

DeCrow was thirty-one when she and Seidenberg made their stand. She recalled, "We went in, and guys were hooting at us. I said, 'Could I please have a glass of ale?,' and we were ignored. So a man sitting at the bar bought us drinks. The crowd didn't turn on us, but they threw him out the door bodily. His face was covered with blood."

Cheeseburgers and chowder arrived at the table, and the women traded stories about the movement. DeCrow recalled that a judge in Syracuse had once greeted her by proclaiming, "Oh, my God, she's here to burn down the courthouse."

Deborah Karalunas, a judge in New York's fifth judicial district, rose, clutching a Lexis printout. "O.K.," she said, "I've just got to read a few excerpts from Seidenberg and DeCrow v. McSorley's Old Ale House":

> The court says, "It may be argued that the occasional preference of men for a haven to which they may retreat from the watchful eyes of wives or womanhood in general to have a drink or pass a few hours in their own company is justification enough . . ."

At "watchful eyes," there were squawks of laughter. Karalunas went on, " 'Without suggesting that chivalry is dead, we no longer hold to Shakespeare's immortal phrase "Frailty, thy name is woman." . . . At least to this extent, woman's "emancipation" is recognized.' "

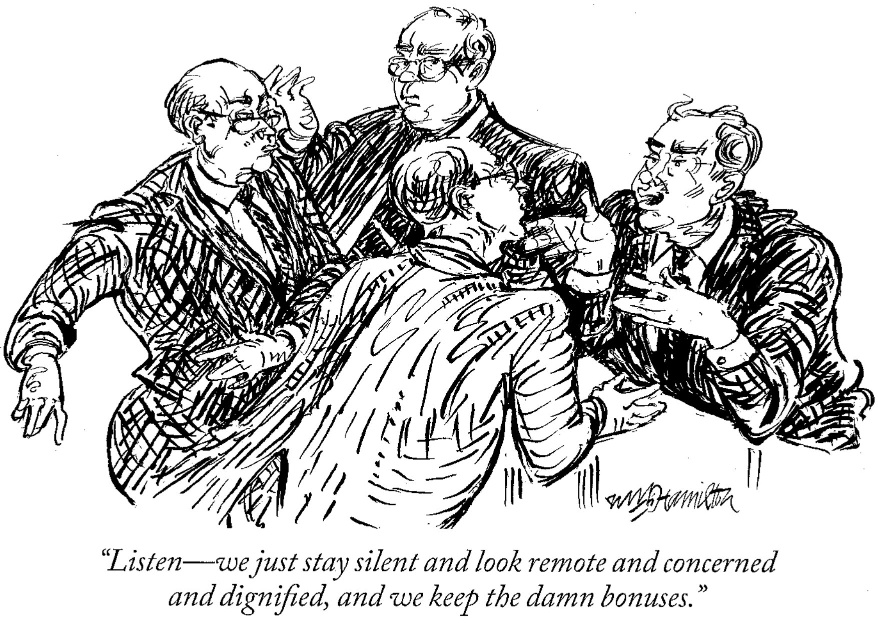
Less than a week later, the order was stayed, but, in August of 1970, Mayor John Lindsay signed a bill barring discrimination in public places in the city, rendering the DeCrow case moot, and McSorley's coed. The same day, Lucy Komisar, a twenty-eight-year-old in a purple jumpsuit, was one of its first female patrons. According to the *Times*, a fight ensued between Komisar and some regulars, drinking ale in their undershirts. "Why, you little . . .," one of them said, dumping a full stein over Komisar's head.

Emboldened by the reminiscences, and perhaps by the ale, the party urged DeCrow to make herself known to the management.

"Ask them if we can take your picture behind the bar," someone urged.

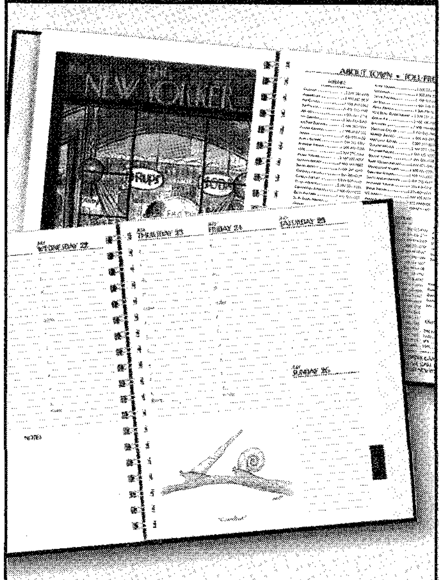
Finally, DeCrow trudged over to the tap. She returned to the table, brushing sawdust off her boots. A barkeep came over with six half-pints of light, on the house.

—Lauren Collins



"Listen—we just stay silent and look remote and concerned and dignified, and we keep the damn bonuses."

THE NEW YORKER DESK DIARY



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ANNALS OF BUSINESS

NOT QUITE CRICKET

Is a billionaire accused of fraud also damaging a noble sport?

BY ALEC WILKINSON

The largest prize that two sports teams have ever played for was twenty million dollars, in a cricket match held last November on a field by the airport in Antigua. The contestants were the English national team and the Stanford Superstars, a team selected from among the best players of the West Indies. The winning players got a million dollars each (there are eleven players on a cricket team); coaches, substitutes, and the cricket boards of each side split the rest. The losing players got nothing.

The field and the purse belonged to Robert Allen Stanford, a gaudy financier who is from Mexia, Texas, and lives on St. Croix. He is also a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda, a nation where he has owned a bank (with all its offshore advantages), an airline, a sports club, a newspaper, a couple of restaurants, and the cricket stadium. He has employed as many as a thousand of the eighty-four thousand people who live on the islands, more than any other citizen, and his relationship to the government has a vestigial, colonial aspect. The Prime Minister, Baldwin Spencer, once said of Stanford, "This man has a lien on our whole country." Stanford was knighted by Antigua, controversially, in 2006, and began having people call him Sir Allen. He is the chairman of Stanford Financial Group, a wealth-management company. According to Forbes's 2008 "Four Hundred Richest Americans" list, he was the two-hundred-and-fifth, with an estimated worth of $2.2 billion; a year earlier he had been the two-hundred-and-thirty-ninth.

If Stanford wasn't widely known in America, he is now. On February 17th, more than a dozen federal agents arrived at his offices in Texas, Mississippi, and Tennessee, and the Securities and Exchange Commission filed civil charges against him and two of his associates, saying they had engaged in a fraud of "shocking magnitude" involving the sale of roughly eight billion dollars' worth of certificates of deposit. (As of last week, no criminal charges had been filed against Stanford, although one of his associates had been arrested.) According to the S.E.C., two of the claims Stanford made to his investors—about how well one of his mutual funds performed and about where he would put the money—were pure deceptions.

In Antigua, Stanford is a commanding figure, with his own mythology. It has been reported that he carried a vial of blood that came from a stigmatic priest he had met. Stanford has said that he simply witnessed the priest's wounds and touched his head to his, thereby experiencing an affirmation of his faith. On the island, he tends to be either esteemed or reviled, depending on one's interests. "Some people love him, and some people love to hate him," Winston Derrick, the publisher of the *Daily Observer*, the paper in Antigua that Stanford doesn't own, told me.

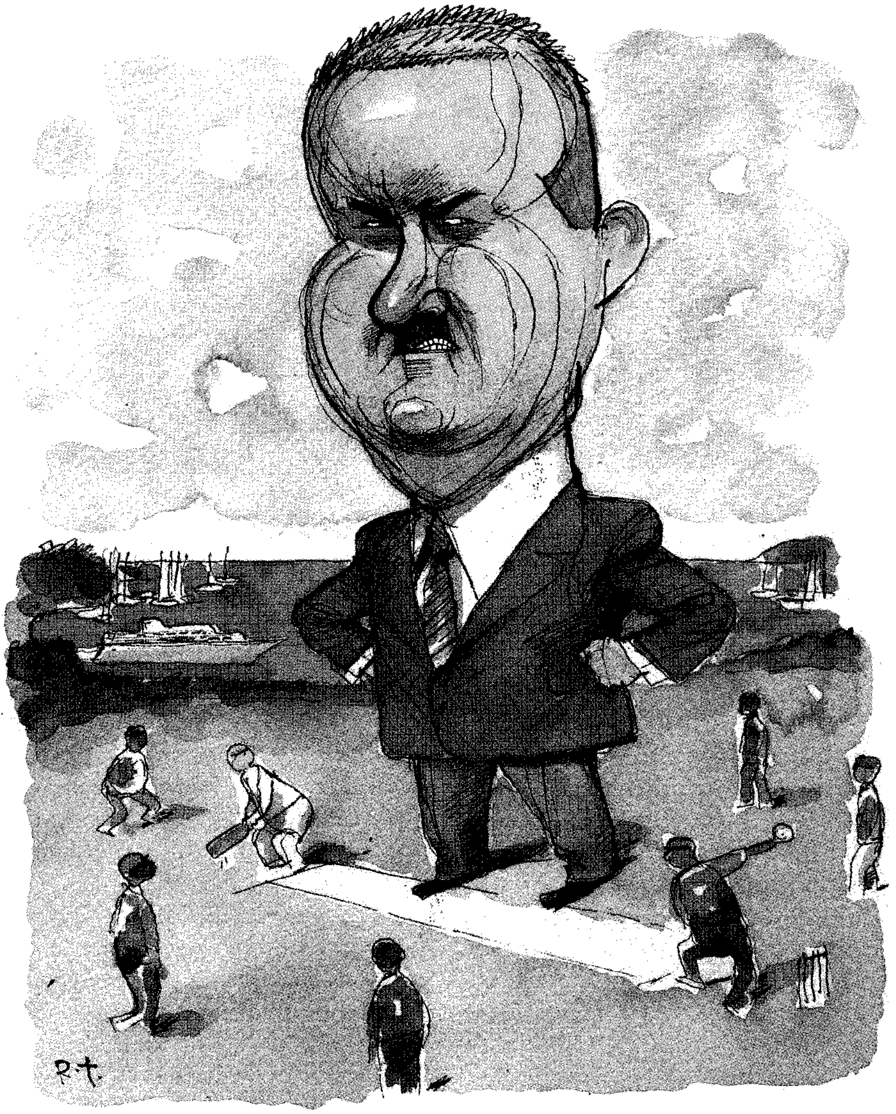
Among the many people in Antigua who care very much about cricket, he is regarded as a savior. He has reportedly spent between sixty and seventy-five million dollars on cricket in the West Indies, which is Steinbrenner-scale money considering the size of the islands' population. Many of those less beholden to him think of Stanford as a shady offshore banker. In 1996, Stanford sued a writer named Klaus de Albuquerque, claiming that he had depicted him in *Caribbean Week*, a paper in Florida, as a money-launderer involved in the drug trade. The suit was settled out of court; the paper's owners agreed, among other things, to publish a front-page apology, to print twice as many copies of the issue as usual, to deliver a hundred copies of it to Stanford, and to pay his legal fees. In 1999, Stanford turned over to the Drug Enforcement Agency $3.1 million, after finding, according to the *Times*, that a former Mexican drug dealer had "hid or laundered money" at his bank in Antigua.

Some on the island have always thought of Stanford as a freebooter who has prospered magnificently on their shores. Jamaica Kincaid was born and grew up in Antigua, and wrote a fierce portrait of the island, "A Small Place." At the ceremony at which Stanford was knighted—with Prince Edward in attendance, and marching bands—Kincaid also received an award. When Stanford approached her, she refused to shake his hand.

"Your honor demeans my own," she told him.

Recently, when I spoke to Kincaid, who has written for this magazine, she said, "He's always been a crook and everybody knows it. Stanford is a standing scandal in Antigua—he's both a joke and a benefactor. In Antigua there's always a man, a person who comes in from the rest of the world—a pirate. Piracy is very close to Antiguan history. They've been coming and hiding money and stealing for hundreds of years. This man comes to Antigua and corrupts the place, and everybody's happy because they're making money.

"The ones who aren't benefitting from it, like me, are the opposition," she continued. "In the papers, after I refused to shake Stanford's hand, I was rebuked by Sir Vivian Richards, the great cricket player, who I had no idea was in with Stanford." She then brought up the airport, "the most holy place" in Antigua, she said. "What Stanford did was he bought land around the airport and transformed the airport. When you go into it now, there are those lovely gardens—he has great taste in gardens. When you came to it in the past, it was just sort of an airport in the tropics. People came to feel it was just a matter of time before Stanford called it the Stanford Airport. No longer, I suppose. I can't tell you how sweet it is."



For some cricket fans, Stanford's support is about the only thing that still redeems him.

RICHARD THOMPSON

When Stanford is in Antigua, he lives on his boat, the Sea Eagle, for which he has built an elaborate compound with a pavilion. To travel between the boat and the pavilion, he usually drives a golf cart. Riding beside him, I asked where the boat had been made.

"Holland," he said. "In the boatbuilding business, there's a saying: 'If it ain't Dutch, it ain't much.'"

Stanford has gone to ground since the S.E.C. charges were filed. I was able to meet him last fall because I was in Antigua to watch his cricket team compete against the English. We had been scheduled to have dinner the night before on his boat, but that was cancelled when the golfer Vijay Singh, who was negotiating a sponsorship deal with Stanford, flew in for the cricket match. When I arrived at the compound the next morning, Stanford was at a meeting across the road at his airplane hangar. He built his boat dock next to the airport, on landfill, so that he could fly in and be on the water in minutes. From a chair in the pavilion, I could see the Sea Eagle, gleaming and nearly motionless on the flat-calm bay. On its deck, a young woman in a skirt and blouse appeared. I watched her walk along the pier until she came up to my chair and asked me if I needed anything. Sir Allen, she said, would be along soon.

He seemed in a good mood when he finally showed up. Stanford is six feet four, with small blue eyes, brown hair cut short, and a mustache. His expression is open and enthusiastic, but there is a suggestion of watchfulness to it. He carries ten or fifteen pounds more than he once did, as a kind of sheen of prosperity. We spoke about the elections in the United States, which were just a few days away. He was concerned that Barack Obama would raise taxes on rich people. I mentioned the name of a hedge-fund manager who had made more than a billion dollars in a year—even if he'd had to pay half of it in taxes, I said, he'd still have more than five hundred million left. Stanford studied me for a moment, as if I were an odd sort of specimen, and then replied, "I just hope they don't squeeze the life out of the last engine in the economy that's got any gas left." Stanford reportedly owes the United States slightly more than a hundred and four million dollars in back taxes.

And yet, whatever secrets Stanford

was keeping, he spoke scornfully of bankers who had invested in subprime mortgages. He had avoided those investments entirely, he said. "I'm in wealth management, and when I looked at those things"—he held his hand forward as if the dubious instruments were in his palm—"when I looked at those things, I couldn't even understand them, and I don't invest in anything I can't understand. 'This is not double-A, triple-A stuff,' I said, 'this is *volatile*.' We didn't invest a dollar in it. Being privately held, we haven't had to chase short-term yields to chase stock prices and give big bonuses."

We were sitting on the deck of the boat, by the stern. Stanford leaned on one elbow, reclining against some cushions, the very picture, I thought, of the rich man at leisure, tranquil and untroubled. (I guess I was wrong.) The sky was almost comically blue. I had not had time for breakfast at the hotel; someone in the boat's galley cooked me eggs and made me coffee. The young woman I had seen earlier stood at a kind of attention just beyond the range of hearing and periodically stepped forward and filled my cup.

Stanford continued to speak of his financial sagacity. "We don't use leverage," he said. "We go one to one. We're not a Vegas-style house. We're a quality investment firm. We believe in quality practices. I'm picking up stuff now for ten cents on the dollar."

Stanford is fifty-eight. I asked when he first came to the Caribbean. "I've been out here twenty-six years on either a full-time or semi-full-time basis," he said. "West Indians and Texans have a kindred spirit; it doesn't matter what you are, what you have, people take you for what's in your heart. I found a reason to have business here. I just felt very comfortable; I loved the weather. Who wouldn't love this?" He spread his arms, showing off the air and the water in a manner that conveyed a comfortable possession.

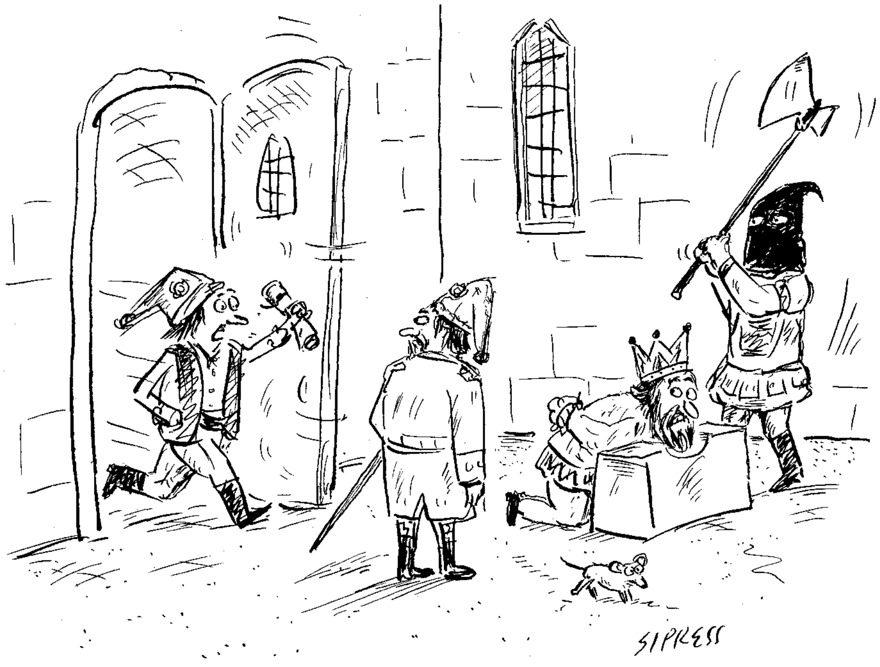
Stanford has said that he is related to Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford University, and that he has a genealogist's research to prove it. The university says it has proof that he isn't, and filed a trademark-infringement suit against his company. Stanford's grandfather, Lodis, a barber, began selling insurance in 1932, and Stanford's father, James, worked for him. After high school, Stanford went to Baylor University, where, he told me, he played football. "I had an athletic scholarship. I put myself through school," he said. "I tore my rotator cuff and broke my collarbone as a quarterback; I got slammed down on the ground." Baylor has no record of Stanford's receiving a football scholarship. His name does not appear among the list of letter winners for football; nor does it appear in the team media guides from 1970 to 1974. A college spokesperson said by e-mail, "I haven't been able to find anyone who was associated with the team during those years who can recall him as a player."

Stanford said that to recover from his football injuries he swam in a college pool, and soon got himself certified as a scuba-diving teacher. Before long, he had five hundred students, he told me. "I was the only scuba-diving instructor within a hundred miles." By the time he graduated, he said, he was making more than his professors. "When I got out of college, before I got serious about what I'm doing, I just wanted to dive in as many exotic places as I could—the Indian Ocean, Seychelles, the Australia barrier reef," Stanford told me. "I was a dive bum."

After roaming and diving, Stanford joined the Stanford Financial Group in the late nineteen-seventies, when he was twenty-six. His father was the chairman. Stanford Financial Group was a small, prosperous insurance and real-estate outfit, with customers in Texas and Mexico. When oil prices collapsed, in the mid-eighties, so did the price of Houston real estate, and Stanford bought a lot of it. When the prices rebounded, he was reported to be much richer. In 1993, he took over from his father.

Stanford was welcomed to Antigua, in 1990, by the government of Sir V. C. Bird, who ran the country as if it were a family business. Stanford had just left Montserrat, where he'd had to surrender his banking license after a British investigation into a bank he'd started there. Antigua was known to have a more forgiving atmosphere when it came to offshore banking.

In 1994, Bird was replaced by his son Lester, who also encouraged Stanford's investments. Stanford proved a polite but touchy citizen. He reportedly paid consultants to help Antigua set up a new banking regulatory board, and sat on it himself for a time; that meant, in effect, that he had a role in regulating himself. He lent large sums to the government, and to two federal ministers. (According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Stanford Financial Group's political action committee and employees have also contributed $2.4 million to American political operations since 2000, and the company has spent $4.8 million on lobbying since 1999, mostly on issues related to money-laundering, financial services, and banking.) In 2004, Lester Bird was defeated in elections by Baldwin



"Stop! Wait! Government's no longer the problem—it's the solution!"

Spencer, who promised to attack the previous government's pervasive corruption. Spencer has tangled with Stanford, whom he described two years ago as "haughty, arrogant, and obnoxious," and said that he had grown weary of his "threats, innuendos, and, now, downright political interference in our nation's affairs." A politician named Steadroy (Cutie) Benjamin, the parliamentary leader of the opposition, put Stanford up for his knighthood, which Spencer opposed. Recently, though, they had maintained a kind of truce.

The smoky glass doors to the yacht's cabin separated and a boy of about twelve walked through them—Stanford's son. People who worked for Stanford told me that he hoped his son would take over for him one day. He was a pleasant-looking boy with straw-blond hair. Stanford has six children and is currently in the middle of a divorce. During the cricket tournament, the papers described an argument that Stanford and his thirty-year-old girlfriend, Andrea Stoelker, conducted in front of observers. The source of their tension, the papers claimed, was an affair Stoelker was carrying on with the captain of the Superstars. Stanford said that he and Stoelker, who was the director of the tournament, had never been happier. The previous evening, he had introduced her to me as his fiancée.

Stanford drove me back to the pavilion, and an attendant there gave me a tour of Stanford's hangar. There were two small jets and one the size of a commercial liner, all of them looking as if they had just been polished. The floor of the hangar looked as clean as that of an operating room. Several planes were elsewhere, the attendant said; Stanford, he added, had the largest private-jet fleet in the world.

During the years in which Stanford built up his business—Stanford Financial Group set up affiliates in Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and Peru—he made what now appears to be an effort to avoid oversight. On February 17th, the S.E.C. filed a complaint alleging that Stanford engaged in "a massive, ongoing fraud." The nature of the fraud was somewhat obscure, even, at that point, to the S.E.C. The main thing is that eight billion dollars seems to be missing. Stanford allegedly acted with the connivance of two associates, James M. Davis and Laura Pendergest-Holt. Davis, who is sixty, roomed with Stanford in college and has worked for him for thirty years. Pendergest-Holt, who is thirty-five, held the title of chief investment officer. She was hired in 1997, according to the S.E.C., having had no experience in the financial-services or securities industries. Subpoenas were sent to Stanford and Davis and Pendergest-Holt before the complaint was filed, but only Pendergest-Holt answered hers. Pendergest-Holt's appearance led people to wonder whether she would supply information against Stanford in exchange for leniency. (Through one of her lawyers, Brent Baker, Pendergest-Holt denied any wrongdoing. Davis and Stanford did not return calls.)

A substantial portion of the complaint attacks the assertions Stanford made to his clients. The returns of one mutual fund, as reported in Stanford's pitch books, were inflated or fictitious, the complaint said—false claims that helped the fund grow from ten million dollars to more than a billion in about five years, earning Stanford more than twenty-five million dollars in fees. In 2006, some investment advisers began asking why their clients were not receiving the returns the pitch books were claiming, so Stanford hired an "outside performance reporting expert," who, according to the S.E.C., told the company that the results included "unexplained 'bad math.'"

According to the S.E.C., Stanford told people buying his C.D.s that their money would be primarily invested in liquid assets, which are easy to sell, and that a committee of more than twenty analysts would keep track of the portfolio. Furthermore, Stanford said that the portfolio was subject to a yearly review by an Antiguan regulator. He sold roughly eight billion dollars' worth of the C.D.s. The S.E.C. says that most of the money was not invested in liquid assets—going instead to real estate and private equity, for example—and that the analysts only monitored around ten per cent of the investments; nor were they audited by the Antiguan regulator. The S.E.C. tried several times to call an accountant in Antigua who was supposed to audit the investment portfolio, but, according to the February 17th complaint, "no one ever answered the phone." The accountant died in January. His daughter, in London, had taken over his modest business, but she told British reporters that she didn't know anything about Stanford. When Pendergest-Holt was asked about the eight billion dollars, she said she didn't know where the bulk of it was—only Stanford and Davis knew.

The S.E.C. was still not sure what Stanford did with all of his clients' money. "We don't know what the components of his wealth are," David Peavler, an S.E.C. attorney, told me. "What we allege—and that is critical—is that the investment director could not explain where the money was."

For some cricket fans, Stanford's support, and, in particular, his promotion of a succinct, modern form of the game known as Twenty20, is about the only thing that still redeems him. In late February, a reporter for the *Telegraph* interviewed a British expatriate standing in line outside Stanford's bank in Antigua to withdraw his money—part of a general run on his banks. "Some people here have always believed he was a con artist and that his wealth was drug money," the man said of Stanford, but added, "When he did the Twenty20 cricket, he was a hero." Yet there are also many people in the cricket world who believe that Stanford has done more than almost anyone to damage a noble game—a charge as serious, in their circles, as anything the S.E.C. could come up with.

Stanford never cared much for traditional cricket, a game that can take five days and end in a draw—"I saw a few matches, and I didn't get that enamored," he told me—but he has embraced Twenty20 as a near philanthropy. Upon seeing it, he thought, "This is the future of the sport. It's only three hours long, it's intense, it will catch the world by storm, and off we go to the races."

Twenty20's most avid reception has been in India, the world's largest cricket market, but it was invented in England, in 2003, after the England and Wales Cricket Board, the E.C.B., learned from surveys that people wanted a version of the game that they could watch after work. A bowler in cricket throws a series of six balls to the batsman; then another bowler steps in. Each series is called an over. In Test cricket, the game's classic form, roughly four hundred and fifty overs are thrown in the course of a match. Twenty20 allows each side just twenty overs. It also rewards big hitters. To purists, it is a little as if baseball had been compressed to three innings, with every player encouraged to just swing for the fences.

Twenty20 emerged when West Indian cricket was in a long and severe decline. Thirty years ago, the West Indies dominated international Test cricket, the first black team to do so. (A single West Indian team represents fifteen nations and territories in Test matches.) The West Indies had four bowlers with frightening speed (the fastest bowlers throw the ball ninety miles an hour), and Sir Vivian Richards, an intimidating batsman (who was knighted by Antigua in 1999), all of whom arrived in the wake of Sir Garfield Sobers, who was perhaps the best all-around player ever. Sobers was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1975 for services to cricket. After these players retired, the West Indies went from playing twenty-seven Test matches in a row without a loss, then a record, to winning only one in fourteen.

Living in the Caribbean, Stanford saw the regard in which the great West Indian cricketers were held. "People lived and died on the pride of that feeling," he said. In 2005, he told me, friends of the West Indies Cricket Board came to him for help. He said, "'Why would I want to do that?' 'Because our cricket is dead and dying,' they told me."

Stanford believed that to return to prominence the West Indians needed to train and play without worrying about money. The best cricketers in England sign contracts with the E.C.B. for up to eight hundred thousand dollars a year to be available for Test play. In the West Indies, players are paid by the match, usually three or four thousand dollars; in a year, they might play ten or twelve matches. In 2006, Stanford held a tournament among players from across the region and from it selected thirty-five players to attend tryouts for the Stanford Superstars. Seventeen were selected, from nine countries; the largest number, four, were from Guyana. He put them up at a hotel, gave them meals, and paid them two thousand dollars a week.

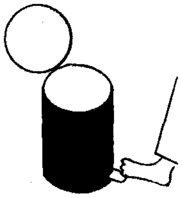
Stanford challenged South Africa to play the Superstars at Twenty20, and when they turned him down he challenged England. Whatever their ambivalence about what it was doing to cricket, the English were eager to receive the lucrative paychecks that came with playing Twenty20 abroad. A deal was soon struck: the English team would play the Superstars once a year, for five years, with twenty million dollars for each match, to be put up by Stanford. To publicize the agreement, Stanford landed by helicopter at Lord's in London—the Vatican of the cricket world—with a clear Plexiglas trunk containing twenty million dollars in cash.

The English players arrived in Antigua a week before the match, and well before the charges against Stanford were revealed. Each day, their relations with him eroded further. Nothing about Stanford seemed too insignificant for the British papers to deplore. His polo shirts were loud; he was "a self-obsessed buffoon"; he had turned cricket into "the new pornography." Furthermore, he had used cricket to make himself "the world's most famous 239th richest man in America."

Virtually the only cheerful voice belonged to the English captain, Kevin Pietersen. "Saturday is going to be a great day for the lads," he said. "We just have to do what we have to do." He seemed most worried about how his side might handle victory. Before they left England, he had warned them not to celebrate too exuberantly, lest they set a poor example during a distressing economic time.

The main match was preceded by five nights of lesser contests. During a match between Middlesex, an English county team, and Pietersen's side, the scoreboard screen suddenly showed an enormous image of Stanford on the terrace of the restaurant overlooking the field. On his knees sat an English player's wife, who was pregnant; he had each of his arms around the girlfriends of two other players. He was smiling broadly. The English looked stunned; the next day, their home newspapers carried many column inches of umbrage. One player said that Stanford deserved to be "chinned."

Peripheral resentments surfaced. The lights on Stanford's field were inadequate, the English said; Stanford could afford brighter ones. Furthermore, Stanford would stride into the English dressing room, which was, by tradition, sacrosanct, as if he owned the place. (It was pointed out that he did.) The English players began to feel that they were engaged in a garish spectacle. Lord Ian MacLaurin, the former head of the E.C.B., described the match as "a week's bash in the sun for a self-publicist knight."



"Will you be watching?" MacLaurin was asked.

"I shall not," he said.

It had rained the morning of the twenty-million-dollar match, and that evening there were still clouds on the horizon, but above the field the sky was deep blue. A steamroller was tamping down the pitch. On the sidelines were dancers in costumes, as at a carnival. The English are said to feel that the atmosphere for cricket in the West Indies, with the music and the dancing and the carrying on, is insufficiently reverent. They call it calypso cricket.

I found Giles Clarke, the chairman of the E.C.B., and David Collier, its chief executive, on the restaurant terrace overlooking the field. Clarke is tall, with lank brown hair, and Collier is short and round-faced, with glasses. I asked if they had a prediction. "We're going to win," Collier said, "but it will be very close, the one-seventies."

"Will you be surprised if you lose?"

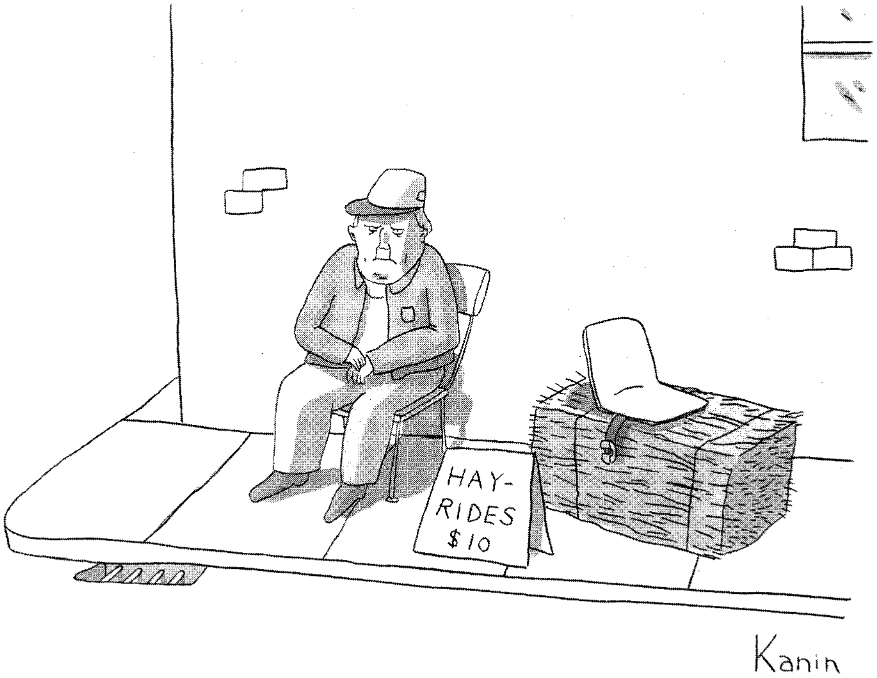
"If we lose, we won't be surprised," Clarke said. "We'll be pissed off." Collier nodded emphatically.

England won the toss and chose to bat first. The teams took the field, the Antiguan anthem was played, and by five-thirty Ian Bell, the first English batsman, described in the program as "fluent and technically correct," was standing on the crease, tamping his bat on the pitch. The crowd was overwhelmingly behind the West Indians. When the Superstars collected the ball before the striker could run (a dot ball, that is), the waitress beside me shouted, "Good stop, good stop—go, Superstars!"

"A hundred countries this is going to," the announcer said. "Albania, Yemen, Mars, moon."

I saw Stanford on the other side of the terrace, with a small crowd around him. He came over and sat with me for a moment. "This is twenty years of my life to pull this together, and three years of my work,” he said. His eyes were so wide he looked alarmed. “I’m at my maximum right now,” he said. Then he tapped my knee and strode off.

I happened to look behind me into the restaurant. It was empty, except for a mild-looking black man in his seventies sitting on a couch in front of a television with his hands in his lap, as if waiting—Sir Garfield Sobers. It was a little like looking through the window of a bar and seeing Willie Mays alone watching a baseball game. In 1968, Sobers became the first batsman to hit six sixes in an over. (A six is like a home run.) I asked if I might join him. He nodded. When I asked why he wasn’t watching from the terrace, he answered without taking his eyes from the television. “I like to watch cricket from in here,” he said. “I can see what’s happening behind the pitcher’s arm. When you sit behind him, you can see the players move in and out, and if you sit outside you see it only from the side.”



Pietersen, the English captain, and Owais Shah were the next batsmen up. “A lot depends on these two English batters,” Sobers said. “If you can get these two out quickly, England will be in real trouble.” For most of their first two overs, they nudged the ball around, getting mostly singles. Then Superstar Darren Sammy (“useful with the bat and capable of catching anything within range”) bowled to Shah, who took a full swing. The ball flew high into the air, toward the boundary line. Two Superstars ran to it, apparently headed for a collision. In the last instant, one of them fell back, and the other caught the ball. A number of women in the crowd began doing a shimmying kind of dance.

“That was a great catch,” Sobers said. “So often that will happen and the two fellows will give up—they see each other at the last. That determination is the kind of thing that wins matches.” Shah left the field with England having only twenty-nine runs for just under six overs, with three batsmen out—not good at all. It was, Sobers said, “a tremendous start.”

I asked Sobers whether the Superstars were bowling well, or the English batting poorly. The Superstars were bowling well, Sobers said. “Very fast, and they’re concentrating just short of a length. The length is the length of the pitch. It makes it difficult for the batsman. You try and slip in the yorker—the one that goes down in the blocking hole, the place at the batsman’s feet.”

I could barely follow what Sobers was saying—it was the first match I had ever seen, and the complications of cricket make basketball look like jacks—but I followed as well as I could. During the next over, Pietersen managed only a single. In the following over, as the bowler, Darren Sammy, ran toward him, Pietersen aggressively hopped forward and planted his feet, intending to send the ball sharply to his left. Sammy threw the ball behind him, striking what is called the legside wicket—and Pietersen was out. The crowd stood and screamed.

“England shouldn’t have a chance now, unless we bowl very bad,” Sobers said cautiously, still not taking his eyes from the screen. “England still have some fairly good batsmen that can turn the tide, but now West Indies is in the box seat. Cricket is a funny game, though. Our fellows might come out and play as bad as the English have. It takes only one ball to hit a wicket.”

The scoreboard screen showed Kevin Pietersen sitting glumly in the English pavilion. On the television, Stanford stood and punched the air above his head. “Sir Allen Stanford,” the commentator said. “He’s loving this!”

During the fourteenth over, the English player Luke Wright sent a ball in a long arc to the boundary. It went up through the black sky, past a crescent moon, as if in a children’s book, past the fronds of some palm trees, and toward Darren Sammy. “That fellow doesn’t drop,” Sobers said. Sammy closed his hands around the ball.

“England’s in real trouble now,” Sobers said. “If they score a hundred and ten, that would be a lot of runs. But cricket is a game of glorious uncertainties.”

Steve Harmison, the last English batsman, came out, swung at the fifth ball of the twentieth over, and missed. His wicket fell, and that was it. England had scored ninety-nine runs.

“If we can’t make a hundred runs, we don’t deserve to win,” Sobers said.

In the bathroom, I heard a man at one of the sinks say gravely to a man drying his hands, “The money stay in the West Indies.”

The Superstars needed only two batsmen to do it. Chris Gayle, the captain, and Andre Fletcher, a twenty-year-old who was more or less making his début, walked onto the pitch and never left. I had taken up enough of Sobers’s time, so I went out on the terrace to watch. One ball after another rolled briskly along the pitch and past the boundary, or sailed through the sky and into the crowd. Each time it did, the spectators danced.

Stanford came by and said, “Have you met the Prime Minister?” He gestured to-

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A new blog
about the movies,
by Richard Brody.

*"Only a gleeful ghoul
from a Charles Addams
cartoon could feel
good while watching
'Slumdog Millionaire'..."*

ward a compact man in slacks and a polo shirt, who had been standing next to me—Baldwin Spencer. "Tonight has been something that has made the entire Caribbean proud," Spencer said.

The scoreboard showed the Superstars standing by their pavilion in a line with their arms around one another's shoulders, swaying like showgirls. The graphic on the scoreboard screen read, "Need five to win twenty million." Andrew Flintoff bowled and Gayle sent the ball on a high ride into the stands—it was clear even before it arrived that he had hit a six. Gayle turned and pulled the middle stump of the wicket from the ground and held it above his head.

The Superstars, Stanford among them, poured onto the field. In their elation, they looked like men who have reached shore after an ordeal. One of them fell to the ground and lay face down, weeping.

"We didn't just beat them," Stanford told me later. "We thrashed the crap out of them. Three years ago, the English would have thrashed us."

Behind the Prime Minister stood Giles Clarke and David Collier, of the E.C.B., who looked grim. Later, when the news of the charges against Stanford broke, there would be calls for their resignations, outrage that they had ever dealt with Stanford, and a hasty cancelling of all of the E.C.B.'s contracts with him. ("There's an awful lot of being wise after the event," Clarke told me last week. "In the end, sporting organizations take what they can get from sponsors—and it's not easy to get.") For the moment, though, amid the joyful crowd, they formed a huddle with Allan Lamb, a former English player, and the three of them began vehemently discussing who should never have been named to the team.

The victory over England may end up being the Superstars' last good memory of their sponsor and his circle. On February 26th, Laura Pendergest-Holt was arrested by F.B.I. agents and charged with obstructing the S.E.C.'s investigation. The complaint says that she had not been honest with the S.E.C. (She has pleaded not guilty. "She definitely denies committing any crime whatsoever," her lawyer Brent Baker told me.) Three confidential witnesses describe discussions that included Pendergest-Holt and "Executive A and Executive B"—clearly Stanford and James Davis. According to the complaint, at a series of meetings in Miami to prepare Pendergest-Holt's testimony, the witnesses "were surprised and unnerved" to learn how sketchy some aspects of the firm's investment portfolio were. One witness "described feeling like he 'had been kicked.' " Another broke down and wept, after which a Stanford lawyer "suggested that they begin to pray together." (Later, when a witness asked the lawyer why he wasn't smiling, he replied, "The party is over.") The portfolio, it turned out, included a loan of $1.6 billion to a shareholder. "More significant," the complaint says, was that the shareholder was "understood to be Executive A"—Allen Stanford.

What isn't yet known is the full consequences of the S.E.C.'s allegations. The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank has taken control of Stanford's bank in Antigua. Last Thursday, Baldwin Spencer convened an emergency session of parliament and recommended that Stanford's assets be seized. In Venezuela, the government has already seized the local Stanford bank, and plans to put it up for sale.

Stanford did not turn up until two days after the S.E.C. charges, when the F.B.I. found him in Fredericksburg, Virginia, at the house of a relative of his fiancée's. The agents who served him the papers said that he had been cordial and had told them to have a nice day. While Stanford was unaccounted for, his father, James, was interviewed. He said he had trouble believing that the allegations were true. CNBC reported that on the afternoon of the day the S.E.C. had charged him Stanford had tried to rent a plane to fly to Antigua. The jet owner insisted on a wire transfer, but Stanford had only a credit card. The S.E.C. had frozen his money. I found it strange to think of his fleet of planes—"the largest in the world"—locked up, and their owner being turned away at an airport. He has since surrendered his passport.

In recent days, Stanford has been compared to the alleged New York Ponzi-

schemer Bernard Madoff. (Stanford's firm also lost money in dealings related to Madoff, according to the S.E.C., although he told clients he had no such exposure at all.) And, indeed, in an amended complaint filed last Friday the S.E.C. accused Stanford of running a "massive Ponzi scheme." It alleged that he and Davis had "reverse-engineered" their financial statements to match a "predetermined return." Madoff's case began at the end, apparently with a confession. Stanford's has just been launched; so far, he has admitted nothing.

Right now, the great mystery is the whereabouts of the eight billion dollars. According to the S.E.C.'s original complaint, after word of its interest began to circulate, Stanford falsely told at least one investor that he could not get his money because the S.E.C. had frozen the account. Another customer was told by the company that Stanford himself had ordered a two-month ban on redemptions. On February 17th, the government actually did freeze the assets of three of Stanford's companies. The Yankees outfielders Johnny Damon and Xavier Nady said that because their brokers had accounts with Stanford they couldn't access their money; Damon said that he hadn't even been able to pay his trainer.

"We have no comment on whether or not there are funds sufficient to cover the investors," David Peavler, the S.E.C. attorney, told me. Months, and possibly years, may pass before Stanford's finances are untangled. "Cases like this one take a long time," an attorney who has handled S.E.C. cases told me. "It isn't pretty, and it isn't quick, and the trustees can burn up a lot of the money."

Anyone who managed to get through to the company was told that it was in receivership; all questions were referred to the receiver, Ralph Janvey, a lawyer in Dallas, who did not respond to requests for comment. The only elaboration I received from many attempts to speak with Stanford's representatives was in an e-mail from one, who wrote, "I am so, so sorry, and so embarrassed."

A couple of weeks after the twenty-million-dollar match—and before the S.E.C. made its charges—I rode the A train to Queens to meet Lennox Cush, who sells real estate at a Century 21 office in Cypress Hills. Cush grew up in Guyana, and was a member of the Superstars—the only American who was. Warming up in Antigua last fall, he had twisted his knee and couldn't play against England. He was awarded about a hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars as a backup player.

Cush's office had rows of cubicles, behind which sat men in dark suits. They regarded me without interest; whatever attribute it was that made someone look like a customer, I didn't have. Cush, who was tall and rangy, took me upstairs to meet his boss. Coming down, he took the steps slowly, and winced. When we got into his car, his X-rays were on the passenger seat. His phone rang, and he said to the person calling, "Can you leave me alone? I just got news that I got to get an operation. My A.C.L. and meniscus."

We drove past two- and three-story buildings until we came to the Hibiscus Restaurant and Bar. While Cush looked for somewhere to sit, I stood by the bar, listening to a man on his phone say that if his truck wasn't repaired by the end of the day he wasn't paying his bill. Several threats and a lot of profanity were involved. When he hung up, he turned to me and said, "I'm sorry, very stressful."

The booths that Cush would have preferred were all taken, so we found a table. A waitress brought us fried rice and vegetables. "I failed the fitness test for my knee one hour before the game," Cush said. When the Superstars won, he jumped into the air, and when he landed he remembered his knee. Then he walked onto the field as fast as he could manage.

I asked Cush about his impression of Stanford. "He's come out of the blue, and he's changed cricket and changed people's lives," he said. "He set all of us for life after cricket."

Two West Indian men walked through the door and came to our table. Cush rose to meet them. They congratulated him and shook his hand. One of them asked what he was going to do next. Cush started to say something, but the other man interrupted. "He's retired," he said. "He's a Twenty20 Stanford man now," and the three of them laughed happily.

We finished our meal and paid and went out on the sidewalk. I asked Cush if he brought his money home with him from Antigua. "No," he said. "We leave it in the bank with Mr. Stanford. He told us he will keep it safe until we need it." ♦

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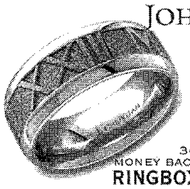

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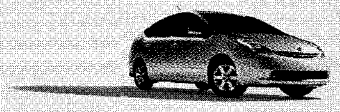

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THE POP LIFE

FLASHING LIGHTS

Lily Allen's dance with fame.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In February, the twenty-three-year-old English singer Lily Allen visited New York to promote her second album, "It's Not Me, It's You." Allen is an almost daily presence in the English tabloids, and her best song, "The Fear," is one of the few compelling songs about fame by a famous person. When she arrived in New York, the paparazzi were ready for her. After a morning appearance on the "Today" show, where she performed "The Fear," which has gone to No. 1 in the U.K., Allen boarded a black S.U.V. to head downtown for breakfast. She wore a loose blue top, black tights, and black suède boots with spike heels. She stands only five feet two. She has a gently upturned nose, big eyes, and bangs, and is quick to smile.

After putting on a black fake-fur coat—"If PETA throws paint on this, they're going to fucking pay the bill for getting it cleaned"—Allen settled into the back seat and lit a cigarette. And then it began. A loose cloud of photographers followed the S.U.V., some on scooters, several in cars, and the rest on bicycles. There were about twenty of them. Allen seemed neither pleased nor displeased by the attention.

She took a phone call. A few days earlier, the London *Daily Mirror* had published a story about Allen having had bad sex with a particular ex-lover. The piece was inspired by the lyrics of "Not Fair," from the new album:

> You know I've never met a man who's made me feel quite so secure.
> He's not like all them other boys, they're all so dumb and immature.
> There's just one thing that's getting in the way;
> when we go up to bed you're just no good, it's such a shame.
> I look into your eyes, I want to get to know you,
> and then you make this noise and it's apparent it's all over. . . .
> Oh, I lie here in the wet patch in the middle of the bed
> I'm feeling pretty damn hard done by, I spent ages giving head.

The *Mirror* claimed that bad sex had ruined Allen's relationship with the forty-five-year-old art dealer Jay Jopling. Allen demanded a retraction, and she got it—her first.

"And they paid for my legal fees!" she exclaimed. She looked out the window and pointed to a photographer on a bicycle. "Oh, God, I know him. He's the one from L.A."

This is the weather system that Allen grew up in, though it was never this intense. Her mother is the film producer Alison Owen, and her father is the comedian and actor Keith Allen, who also has a reputation for having a loose tongue. He stormed off a TV talk show in 1989 during a debate about situation comedy, shouting, "All of you, you're dead!" His more famous moments include writing a nonsensical football chant called "Vindaloo" ("na na na" are the key lyrics) and playing a drug dealer in Danny Boyle's "Trainspotting." Through her father, Lily became friendly with celebrities like the late Joe Strummer, of the Clash, and the artist Damien Hirst. "We were BlackBerry messaging last night," she said of Hirst. "I was trying to get him on Twitter, but he wouldn't do it. I signed off, 'Good night. —Dame Moody Wench.' " Her babysitter was Nellee Hooper. "He used to wear a Sex Pistols T-shirt and turn up with a skateboard under his arm. Fifteen years later, he's a superproducer." (Björk, Gwen Stefani, Madonna.)

None of this has much to do with how Allen became known, though it likely has something to do with how she has found her voice. There are always several hundred or so people growing up in the fishbowl of fame, and most of them end up hobbled in some way, intimidated by their parents' fame or softened by privilege. Lily Allen is not the usual product of such an environment. She is frank, quick on her feet, and sometimes as good a lyricist as classic songwriters whom she would not likely group herself with. Allen's bluntness and her inability to keep her jokes to herself may be what gets her into the tabloids, and vexes her critics, but they are also the key to what her handlers must call her "brand," and what anyone else could call her gift. Later in the day, when she was talking to someone from her label, it didn't seem preposterous when she suggested working with the producer T Bone Burnett and the songwriter Randy Newman for her next album.

Allen's songs are simultaneously offhand and precisely calibrated—her lyrics sound like they could be the thoughts of any young woman anywhere in the world, yet they are carefully composed and matched to music with a deftness that few of her peers have. "The Fear" is about the psychological effects of being constantly watched. One reason it works is that the problems of public self-consciousness and identity are universal insecurities, give or take a few diamonds.

"The Fear" begins with the digital equivalent of a finger-picked nylon guitar, then Allen singing. As she often does, Allen uses her small but supple voice to sound like she's talking, even though she is articulating a melody. "I want to be rich and I want lots of money," she sings, as the guitar continues. "I don't care about clever, I don't care about funny. I want loads of clothes and fuckloads of diamonds. I heard people die while they are trying to find them." At the end of this first stanza, the rest of the music comes in, a bright rock song meant for dancing, like a Blondie song with fewer guitars. More to the point, Allen is playing a role, though some people will assume that the first-person lyrics are her own thoughts. (As she put it to me, the song is "about a character, about a generation of young girls.") The narrator of "The Fear" is living by the rules of the paparazzi:

The bluntness that gets Allen into the tabloids is also her gift as a songwriter. Photograph by Jeff Minton.

> I'll take my clothes off and it will be shameless,
> 'cause everyone knows that's how you get famous.
> I'll look at the *Sun* and I'll look in the *Mirror*.
> I'm on the right track—yeah, I'm onto a winner.

The chorus, a dreamy swoop of airy, multitracked vocals that belie the anxiety in the words, is the crack in that character's armor, a moment of doubt: "I don't know what's right and what's real anymore, and I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore." This is what it means to be "taken over by the fear." If you're not sure what Allen is up to, she tells us before the third chorus: "Now everything's cool as long as I'm getting thinner." Anyone can recognize the unreliable narrator in this protest; Allen's fans will catch the reference to her much publicized battles with weight.

With "The Fear," Allen has found a way to colonize the paparazzi. The scrutiny she has endured has not driven her into some unbearable version of what the critic Simon Reynolds recently called "the superstar blues." Allen hasn't built a song to make you feel sorry for her. "The Fear" makes you feel sorry for anyone crippled by self-consciousness, famous or not.

What kind of celebrity will a paparazzo chase? Female stars are generally photographed in neutral zones like the red carpet, a DMZ where most play by the rules of fame and stay within lines. This is because many entertainers appear as if they live within lines, and aren't expected to atomize in public and do untoward things. Only a young woman who seems likely to burst into profanity, stumble drunkenly into another person, or drive into a tree can satisfy the needs of a paparazzo who serves a larger, uglier public demand. The fact that the young woman in the photograph might be squandering her youth and beauty on hedonism allows a fully prurient relationship to the image, and is worth an unusual amount of money. Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Amy Winehouse, and a few others—Marilyn Monroe and Edie Sedgwick are two earlier iterations—allow bystanders an opportunity to both ogle and judge. In England, Lily Allen is one of the people who is ogled and judged, daily.

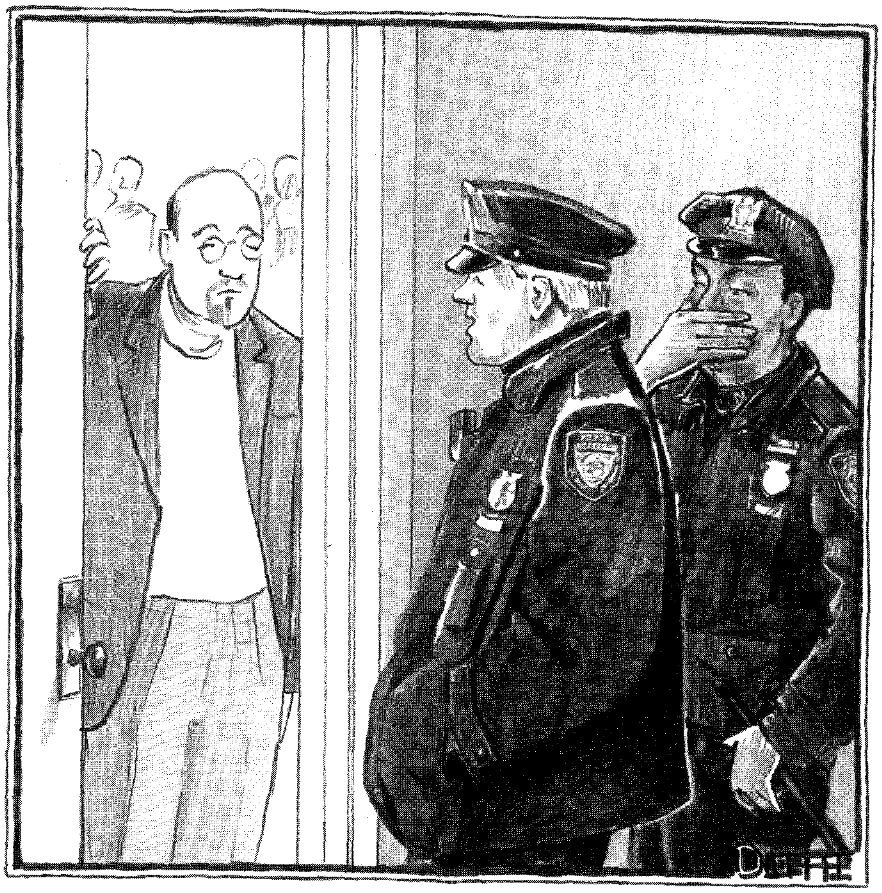
Allen's S.U.V. pulled up near Café Gitane, a French-Moroccan eatery on Mott Street. Here, on a day when, a few hours later, both Hugh Grant and Hugh Jackman were seen walking around SoHo free of photographic tails, Allen was subjected to a degree of scrutiny that was more like a public stoning than any kind of photography. In the twenty feet between the door of the S.U.V. and the entrance to the restaurant, twenty people raised their cameras, all of which burst into tiny white stars with misleadingly soft pops. They screamed at Allen.

"Lily, turn around! Lily, are you having breakfast? Lily, how do you like New York?"

The photographers, many of them tall and unexpectedly burly, got as close as possible to Allen without touching her, and stopped short at the door of the restaurant. Once inside, Allen realized that she had dropped her black Chanel bracelet. She dashed out to find it, and as her driver handed it to her the photographers let loose another smear of light and shouting. When Allen reëntered, the waitresses, looking confused, lowered the window shades and drew a heavy blue curtain around the front door. The photographers stood at the windows, ready to wait out the entire meal. Allen's first reaction was to laugh. She asked her publicist, "Can we not get security for the next two days? It's only going to get worse. I mean, I don't want to be diva-ish, but . . ."

Growing up with her mother, who had divorced Keith Allen, Lily became used to an unsettled life—moving around London, living with famous people like her mother's boyfriend the comedian Harry Enfield, transferring from school to school. When she was fifteen, she dropped out and went to Ibiza. This peripatetic life style was not the result of penury; as Allen put it to me, her way of life "definitely got posher" as her mother produced more successful films, including "Elizabeth" and "Shaun of the Dead."

When, about five years ago, Allen finally decided to make music in earnest, her strategy was not so different from that of other musicians. She found producers and began making demos. In 2005, she was signed to Regal Records, and was given a budget of twenty-five thousand pounds. After she had recorded a few songs, she started a MySpace page—not as routine then as it later became—where she streamed songs that were not commercially available, posted pictures of herself cavorting, and began writing emotional blog posts and building her public persona: an accessible figure who seemed a lot like her fans. Allen eventually became one of MySpace's



"It's not the noise, sir. It's the Camembert."

most popular artists. Her taste for what is now commonly known as over-sharing was part of a grassroots publicity campaign that cost Allen and her label nothing. Her most infamous blog post is from May, 2007, and was originally accompanied by a digital photograph of Allen, who appeared to have been crying. (The post is still there, but the photograph is gone.) The title of the post was "fat, ugly and shitter than winehouse." Allen wrote:

> I felt like it didnt matter if I was a bit chubby cause , im not a model , I'm a singer . Im afraid I am not strong and have fallen victim to the evil machine . I write to you in a sea of tears from my hotel bed in Seattle , I have spent the past hour researching gastric bypass surgery , and laser lipo suction.

Allen's début, "Alright, Still," went on to sell two and a half million copies worldwide, a significant number in today's marketplace. Because "Alright, Still" was pieced together in the course of almost two years, with a variety of producers, there is no dominant sound. Some songs skip along to old calypso samples; many flirt with derivations of reggae and ska. None of it sounded particularly of the moment in 2006, and the slightly ragged feel of the album works well with the voice of a young woman—then just twenty—who seems to be talking to herself. In "LDN," she rides around London noticing decay and deceit and concludes that this is London as London should be. "Smile" was her biggest hit, a primer on Schadenfreude—when her ex cries, she smiles. "Alfie" scolded her younger brother for smoking too much weed, and "Nan, You're a Window Shopper" upbraids her grandmother for simply being old. It was the work of a callous kid with a tendency to say everything on her mind, including the ugly and the vulnerable. Allen is not a fantasist or a fist-pumper. If her voice is small, so is her landscape: "Observe and document" could be her motto.

Allen is the girl you know who happened to become famous, pretty but not otherworldly, and apparently not media-trained. That's where the public incidents come in, some of which are YouTubed—such as a run-in with Sir Elton John at an awards show, when he commented on her drinking and she told him to fuck off. She has insulted members of British bands like the Kooks and criticized English pop-culture figures like Cheryl Cole, all a bit obscure to American fans. Less obscure is her public feud with the gossip hawk Perez Hilton, which he and Allen conducted on Twitter. (She called Hilton a "bitter lonely old queen," and he struck back by calling a decision to briefly sell her new album on Amazon for $3.99 "desperate.")

Even her father has cautioned Allen publicly to "know when to shut up." Still, she hasn't done much beyond saying things that rile people—most recently, suggesting that cocaine use isn't necessarily a big deal and dismissing Christianity. She hasn't been filmed smoking crack or driving recklessly. More seriously, she suffered a miscarriage in early 2008, when she was dating Ed Simons, of the Chemical Brothers, who is fifteen years her senior. That event may have changed her opinion about being in the papers—she disappeared from the press for a spell last year while making her new album.

"It's Not Me, It's You" has already débuted at No. 1 in England and at No. 5 on the American charts. By the time Allen had finished breakfast at Café Gitane, she knew about her chart position in England but had not yet heard about the U.S. On the way back to the Mercer Hotel, she and her publicist made an attempt to visit Prada on Mercer Street, which wasn't yet open. Employees in the store gestured furiously behind the windows, as if to indicate that there was a secret passage into the store somewhere below. Surrounded once again by photographers, Allen ended up at the service entrance of a building next to Prada, but not, apparently, the right one. All of a sudden, a smiling, unshaven man dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a flat cap approached her.

"Miles!" Allen cried, embracing him. She was being rescued, in a manner of speaking, by Miles Leonard, the president of A. & R. for Parlophone, Allen's label in the United Kingdom. Leonard helped Allen navigate crossing the street to her hotel, which involved kicking out the leg of a photographer who tried to block the doorway.

"You don't have to abuse the people who are trying to make it work!" the photographer said, as Allen collapsed on a couch in the lobby, laughing.

The two discussed the sales figures and the day's plans. Allen was scheduled to play a free show sponsored by MySpace at the Bowery Ballroom that evening to celebrate the American release of her album. After some pleading, Leonard was persuaded to accompany her back to Prada, which was now open. Her publicist had apparently arranged for security to appear later in the day for her show, but her immediate well-being was in the hands of her small entourage and the driver, a polite Russian man. Following a quick tour through Prada, which left Allen unimpressed, she decided it was time for Leonard to make good on an old promise.

After some very circuitous driving through midtown traffic, Allen and Leonard ended up at Aaron Faber, on Fifty-third Street. Photographers lined the entire glass storefront, filming and flashing every time Allen turned toward the window. After some negotiation and wheedling, Allen got Leonard to agree, grudgingly, to split the cost of an eight-thousand-dollar vintage Rolex from the fifties, a fairly plain gold watch with a bendy metal strap.

"You've promised me a gold Rolex for four years!" Allen said, in not entirely convincing mock indignation. "I just sold thirty-five thousand albums yesterday. *Yesterday!*"

Leonard smiled and folded his arms. It wasn't clear if this was an actual discussion, a game, or a bit of both. Allen's credit card was declined, so Leonard ended up charging the watch on his card. ("I said 'I'll go half with you' knowing my card had no money on it," Allen said later.) She leapt in the air wearing her new watch, giving the paparazzi something to photograph, finally.

On the way back to the hotel from the watch store, Leonard and Allen discussed the problems that the label might have getting "Not Fair" played on morning radio in Britain.

"You know what it is?" Allen asked without any particular rancor, while looking out the window. "It's that it's a girl singing about sex. Any fucking hip-hopper, they'll play all those 'Suck on my dick, bitch!' They'll play that till the cows come home. This is just because it's a girl. But that's what's infuriating about it. Something like Radio 1 really should stand up for itself. How are things ever going to change? You're just going backwards now."

There was talk about removing the phrases "giving head" and "wet patch," though there was speculation that a song about bad sex might itself be the barrier.

"I just don't think the song is as good without that bit in," Allen said.

"Alright, Still" had the hallmarks of a felicitous blip, one of those albums that spring out of fired-up young people who are never heard from again. "It's Not Me, It's You," though, is a stronger and more coherent record than her début, though it's not necessarily more "mature," a word that floats around every time a young musician manages to make a good second record.

Allen recorded and wrote the album with the producer and songwriter Greg Kurstin, a soft-spoken musician from Los Angeles. Much of it was done in the Cotswolds, in several cottages where Kurstin set up makeshift recording studios.

"Alright, Still" was created in a fashion that has become common for pop records: producers delivered completed tracks, and Allen wrote vocals for them. Kurstin and Allen wrote "It's Not Me, It's You" more like a band or a classic Tin Pan Alley duo. Using only keyboards and a laptop, Kurstin wrote chord progressions, which Allen then sang over. Allen does not prepare material before entering the studio. "I only write when I'm recording," she explained. The two went back and forth, shaping songs to Allen's vocals, rather than to a preëxisting track.

The result is a wide-ranging pop album that moves steadily from hook to hook. ("It's more Greg than it is me," Allen said.) But her voice is the center, in every sense. She's no more polite than before, but she's more empathic, and her mind ranges beyond her life in London. "Him" is a song about God—or, rather, imagining God as a person. Allen doesn't struggle for epiphanies or fight against her own skeptical nature. "Him" is another example of Allen unbound; record labels don't usually want their young pop stars to start pondering the Great Unknown. Allen manages to both do it and not do it—her God is mortal, not a metaphysical cloud but perhaps a slightly older famous friend:

> Do you think he's any good at remembering
>   people's names?
> Do you think he's ever taken smack or
>   cocaine?
> I don't imagine he's ever been suicidal.
> His favorite band is Creedence Clearwater
>   Revival.

Both of Allen's albums are very much studio creations, and she is not exactly a road veteran. The new album, especially, features a huge range of room tones and vintage styles and presents a challenge for her live band, four skilled and forceful but fairly anonymous musicians. At the Bowery Ballroom, they performed some of the parts Kurstin wrote, though sounds that were hard to reproduce simply played in the background as sequenced, prerecorded tracks. Rather than bring along backup singers, Allen has opted to use backing tracks to reinforce the bigger vocal moments, like the harmonies in the chorus of "The Fear."

She performed in a pouf of a red dress and heels, danced occasionally, and sang accurately and amiably, though with no particular sense of urgency. The crowd, however, was unusually loud and supportive for a New York audience. People knew the records, and were happy to celebrate the fact that Allen was there.

After finishing "Not Fair," Allen addressed the audience. "You were singing along to that one, and it's only just come out today," she said. "You must have been illegally downloading." The crowd laughed. "That's O.K.," she went on. "I don't make any money from recordings anyway." ♦

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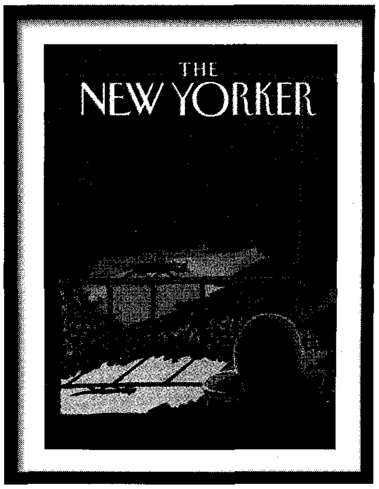

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MEMO FROM THE C.E.O.

BY PATRICIA MARX

It is with deep regret that we inform you of certain cost-cutting measures that will be taken in the coming days so that we can remain competitive. But first some good news. We are happy to report that Bring Your Child to Work Day has been renamed Bring Your Child to Do Work Day. We hope you will contribute unstintingly to the Gummy Bears Overtime Fund.

Now for the harsh realities. We will no longer be serving complimentary cold cuts and soda on Cold Cuts and Soda Day. Stairs will go up, but not down. Please do not use the fire extinguisher unless there is no water in the toilets. Anyone wishing to put out a medium-to-large fire must first fill out form X34J (if in stock). Mr. Johnson and Mr. Green, you will be sharing a desk chair, although you may keep separate desks. With regard to our annual retreat, spouses of non-management employees will be considered luggage. The letters "K," "Q," and "Z" are costly and should be used sparingly. Anyone who would like to volunteer for the human weather-stripping experiment, contact Nan Newberg. Also, as of next Wednesday, there will be no Wednesdays.

A number of you have asked about the employee-suggested programs that were implemented last year. While we were all heartened by their popularity—yay, associate assistants!—most of them will be suspended. These include: Kitten Appreciation Moment, Say Hello Day, and the Mandatory Toilet Paper in the Rest Rooms Policy. We are particularly saddened that elevator privileges for housekeeping will once again be on a pay-to-play basis. In order to maintain company morale, however, the mojito fountain in the executive lounge will continue to operate as usual.

The "Don't Leave Your Coffee Cups on Joan Fulenwider's Desk: It's Not a Trash Can (Well, It Kind of Is!)" rule will remain in place, although, as of next week, Ms. Fulenwider will not. We are all sad to see Ms. Fulenwider go, but can we agree that this is a blessing in disguise, since, clearly, it is now or never for her as far as starting a family goes? Good luck, Joan, and kindly return the stapler on your way out.

Mr. Pepall, every day is now casual Friday for you. In fact, you don't even have to bother getting out of bed. If time is money, mazel tov—you are now a rich man.

To those of you in Quality Control: As indicated by the new sign in your rest room, employees must wash their hands before not returning to work. If you don't understand what that means, ask Mr. Pepall.

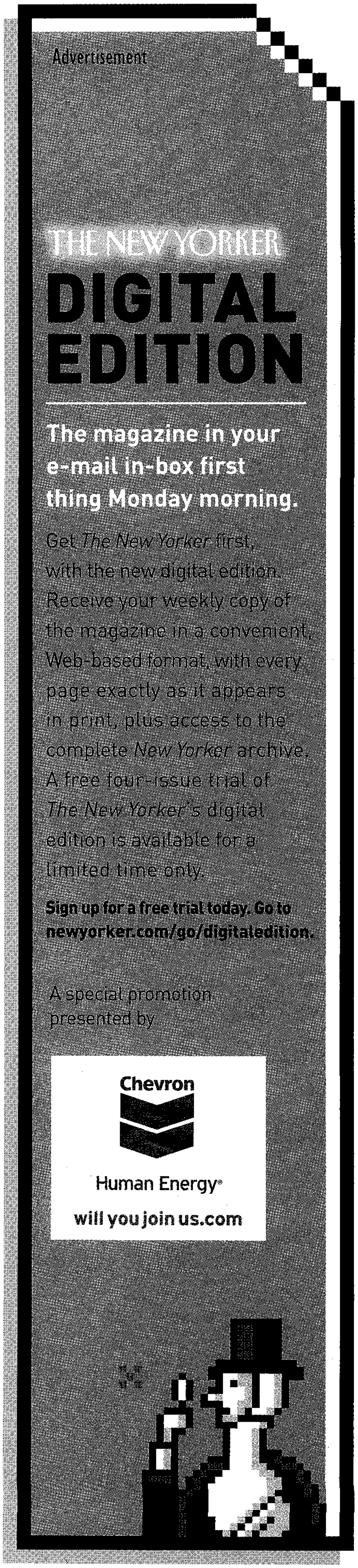
It has come to our attention that certain persons feel that executive-compensation packages have been unduly awarded. Management has zero tolerance for negativity. Moreover, now is not the time to play "the blame game." In days like these, we must tighten our belts and be team players. Note: Anyone who received a signing bonus will be required to return it, posthaste, with interest. In fairness, senior V.P.s were asked to give back the income from last year's exercised options, but they concluded that the calculation would be difficult and onerous.

Finally, we'd like to announce, with tremendous relief, that once Mr. Pepall and the folks in Quality Control go (and after Mr. Sonnenfeld is replaced with voice mail) no further layoffs are foreseen this quarter. From now on, however, we will operate as a "Stage 2 Company." Anyone wishing to retain his or her job must therefore: (1) obtain an updated photo I.D. (available through Mr. Pepall) and (2) furnish your own salary.

Reminder to members of the Stage 2 Planning Committee: Please let us know whether you prefer swordfish or steak, aisle or window, silver or gold.

We believe these adjustments will result in a stronger, more resilient company. Just think: If every employee could give us merely half of his or her life savings, we would be on the road to a "solution mode"! So let's put the bad times behind us and all move forward, except for the following persons (see attached).

Have a nice day. ♦



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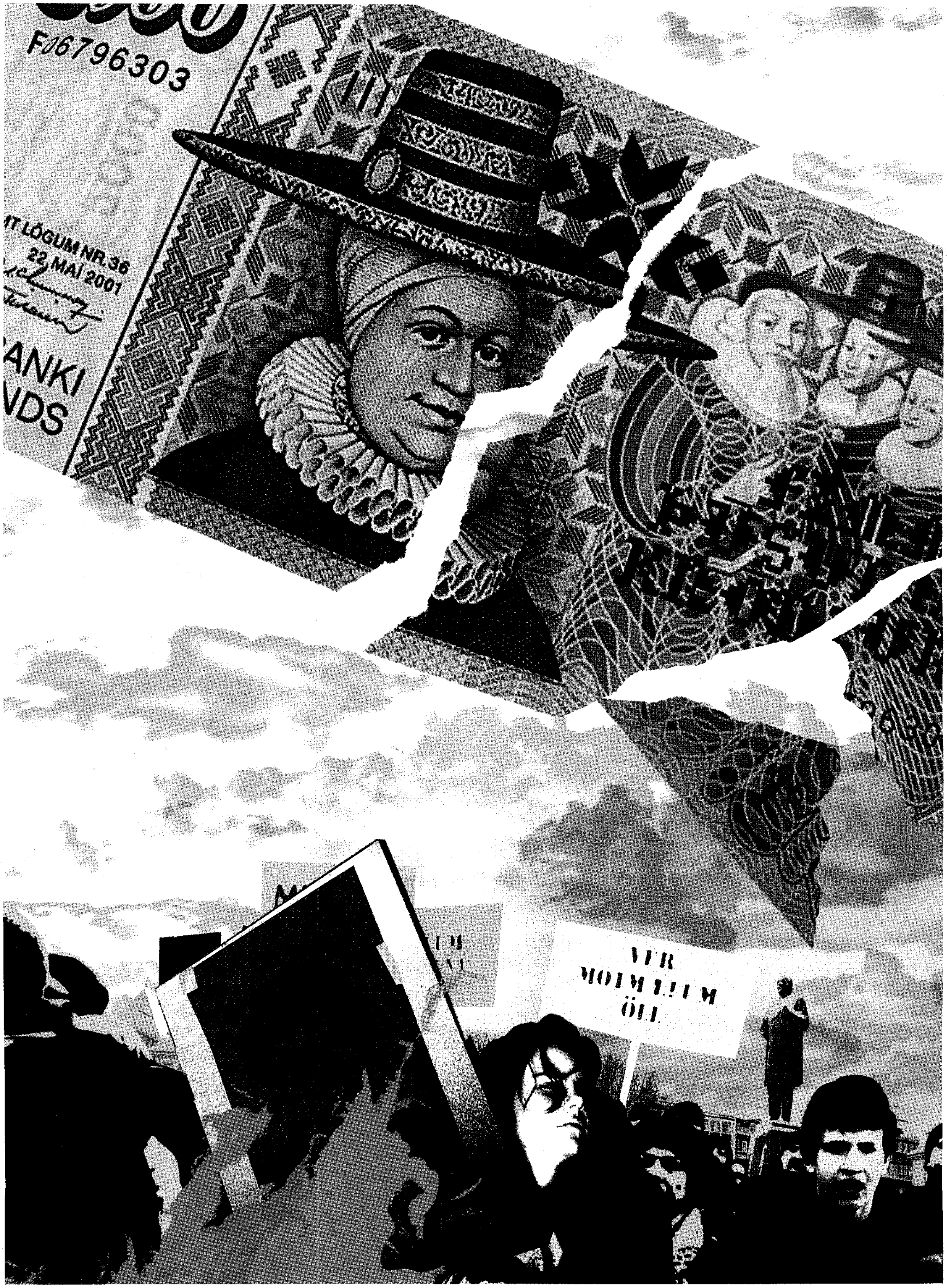
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LOST

After financial disaster, Icelanders reassess their identity.

BY IAN PARKER

On an afternoon in December that ended in a disturbance that fell short of a riot, a few hundred demonstrators met on a bleak grassy hill in the center of Reykjavík, in Iceland. A cold wind blew in from the sea. It had been two months since the onset of the *kreppa*, or crisis—the financial disaster in which Iceland's three main banks, having grown to many times the size of the national economy, all collapsed, along with the country's currency and its reputation for pluck. And the question asked by any visitor was also being asked by Icelanders themselves: When a wealthy, First World country—publicly funded medicine, private jets, evenings of chamber music—experiences a catastrophe that shocks its neighbors and brings the International Monetary Fund to its aid, what happens next? How does ruin turn out? Although there were obvious signs of financial turmoil, including newspaper classifieds where the price of a car was negative (sellers offered to pay thousands of dollars to have the vehicle, and its foreign-currency loan, taken off their hands), the bust was not fully formed. To see Iceland this winter was to be reminded of that queasy split second during which a spectacular injury decides on its accompanying level of pain.

But if Iceland's economic misery was largely still to come, its cultural and political trauma had been immediate. Icelanders had been disgraced by October's crash. "Maybe we can become a kind of museum of how not to do things," Jónína Benediktsdóttir, a local businesswoman, said to me one day. Citizens were mad at their seemingly blithe political leaders and, to some degree, mad at their own boom-era nonchalance; and in a series of increasingly animated demonstrations—in frozen gray public spaces—Icelanders had been calling for political change and national rethinking. Iceland was having a revolutionary moment, if of a sometimes hesitant and self-mocking sort.

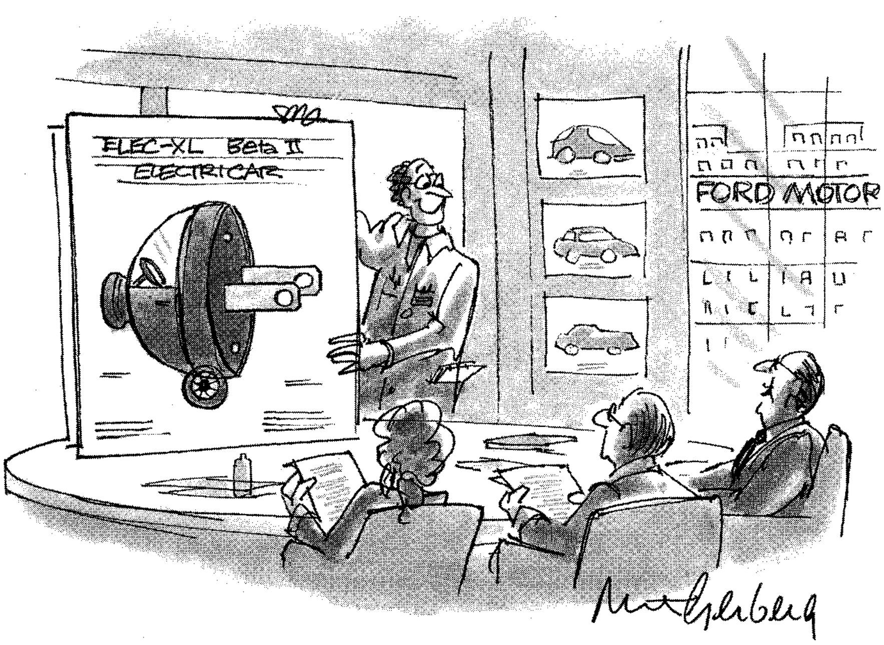
JOHN RITTER

"We've never done this before," Hildur Margrétardóttir, an artist and protester, said. She was carrying, at the end of a long pole, a papier-mâché model of a bloody horse's head, which referred to a medieval Icelandic method of upsetting one's neighbors. "We're not the protesting kind. We'd rather stay at home and have things cozy. We don't even know how to dress in cold weather. We're really sofa people."

It was three in the afternoon, which is when an Icelandic winter's day, having just started, begins to wrap things up. Above us was a tall bronze statue—a rendering of the man said to be Iceland's first permanent settler (from Norway, in the ninth century). From the foot of the statue, we had a wide view of Reykjavík, including the 101 Hotel, whose bar, in the expansionist era just ended, was a meeting place for financiers and entrepreneurs—the men sometimes known as Iceland's *útrásarvíkingar*, or modern-day Viking raiders. We could also see a construction site at the water's edge. There, a dark building, half done, was surrounded by motionless cranes and mud. This was a national cultural center—intended to be covered in adventurous glasswork designed by Olafur Eliasson, the Danish-Icelandic artist best known in America for the waterfalls he installed around Manhattan last summer. The crisis had brought a halt to construction. Now, in its unfinished, unclad form, the building had become a national cultural center of the most topical kind. I later spoke to Thorhallur Vilhjálmsson, the building's marketing manager—that is to say, a salaried optimist—and asked whether work would re-start anytime soon. He replied, "Should I say what I think will happen or what I hope will happen?"

Wind filled the black flags of a dozen or so young anarchists, many of whom had theatrically covered their faces with scarves. Some in this group did have experience in rebellion, having joined a continuing fight about the Icelandic government's investment in aluminum smelters—and the power plants required to run them—in rural areas. The other protesters were mostly older; they kept their hands in their coats, and frowned into the cold. Iceland's winter revolt had no unifying color or motif. The closest thing to that was the image, in various forms, of Davíd Oddsson—a former long-serving Prime Minister, who, as chairman of the board of governors of the Central Bank, was the man blamed more than any other for Iceland's embarrassment. He has the baggy face and unruly hair of a French public intellectual, and his visage could be seen on a number of scornful placards, including one in which his head was superimposed on the body of a dwarf in diapers smoking a cigar.

From the foot of the statue, Edward Huijbens, a geographer who teaches at the University of Akureyri, in northern Iceland, spoke briefly. In his thirties, he was a neatly Bolshevik figure, wearing a black fur hat, a white shirt, and a dark tie. I had met Huijbens earlier in the day, when he had risked bringing discredit to his discipline by losing his way on a half-mile walk across western Reykjavík, and had talked about his experience in anti-globalization protests elsewhere in Europe, noting one obvious brake on unruly behavior in a country with a population of three hundred and twenty thousand: "If you're in a rampaging mob running through town, within five minutes you'll probably encounter your uncle." Now, on the hill, he made his short introduction—starting, "Brothers and sisters"—which was followed by words from an economist, a writer, and others. No one kept the microphone for long: we were on a treeless slope in temperatures far below freezing. Fervor was chased off by the wind. The event ended after thirty minutes, with a performance by a spirited Icelandic rapper, who rhymed *útrás*—as in *útrásarvíkingar*—with *landrad*, meaning



"Good start, Maxwell. Now concentrate a bit more on aesthetics."

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"treason." He cried out, "Revolution!," to which I heard one answering cry.

Iceland's Central Bank was just a few steps away. A policewoman and a policeman stood guard. About forty protesters walked swiftly toward the bank and a chant began: "Out with Davíd!" Someone threw an egg that hit a wall and splashed a drop or two onto the policewoman's shoulder. Two bananas landed at her feet. Iceland's protests had a consistently culinary theme: *skyr*, Iceland's yogurt-like specialty, was often involved; that day, milk and cheese had been thrown onto the lawn in front of the Prime Minister's office; and at an earlier protest I had seen a bag of potatoes spilled onto the sidewalk by the Parliament building—potatoes being the gift brought by Iceland's Santa Claus to children who are out of favor.

A skinny young man—equipped with a ski mask against police pepper spray, and shivering from cold or adrenaline—harangued the police while holding up a flyer for "Zeitgeist: Addendum," the sequel to a loopy but slick online documentary, made in America, that endorses familiar secret-government conspiracy theories (9/11 an inside job, and so on) while arranging them in a vaguely Marxist setting. The ski-mask protester, whose name was Gudjón Valgardsson, had started an Icelandic "Zeitgeist" group on Facebook which had three thousand members, who were perhaps responding in particular to the film's extravagant representation of the U.S. Federal Reserve, and of banking in general. A country that has been let down by its financial institutions might like to think of bankers, and central bankers, as co-conspirators in murder, rather than, say, as heedless incompetents who used to play high-school soccer in Reykjavík with one's father. A country overwhelmed by evil has more dignity than one tripped up by fools. When I spoke to Valgardsson, that evening, he was genial and smart, "Zeitgeist" notwithstanding. He said of the protests, "We are a force that cannot be stopped. We'll be as peaceful as we can ethically allow ourselves to be."

Wearied by the fruit and the verbal abuse, or for some more tactical reason, the police withdrew. The protesters easily pried open the bank's sliding doors and surged forward with a cheer—but into a low-ceilinged corridor that ended at another set of glass doors. These doors wouldn't budge. Protesters furiously beat the glass with their fists and whatever else. Again: "Out with Davíd!" Beyond, we could see the marble lobby of the Central Bank, and, before long, a line of Icelandic riot police. On both sides of the glass, young Icelanders now found themselves in largely untested roles. (And, inevitably, they were known to one another, or at least at one remove. "Everybody knows everybody," I had been told more than once.) The police stepped forward—an action carrying some hint of menace—and the protesters continued to bang on the doors and wave a cutout of Davíd Oddsson wearing Devil's horns.

But the rush of pugnacity was fading, and what had begun as an invasion was becoming a sit-in. Threatened by police with pepper spray, the protesters raised their hands to show open palms. They then sat on the floor, and sang, among other songs, "We're all living in a terrorist regime," to the tune of "Yellow Submarine." An hour into the protest, the air in the unventilated corridor had soured. Astutely, the protesters offered to leave if the riot police withdrew first. The police moved back, to cheers. The corridor emptied and people drifted into the evening, stepping over eggshells. There were no arrests. Geir Jon Thorisson, Reykjavík's avuncular and remarkably tall chief superintendent of police, stood near the doorway, like a clergyman seeing off his congregation. A protester urged him to watch "Zeitgeist" on the Internet that night after work; he apologetically replied that he had to go to singing practice.

On the afternoon of October 6, 2008, Geir Haarde, then Iceland's Prime Minister, addressed the nation on television with the solemnity of a leader about to take a country into war. He announced plans for an emergency bill allowing the government to take control of the giant Icelandic banks that were sliding into default, and he reported on a "very real danger . . . that the Icelandic economy, in the worst case, could be sucked with the banks into the whirlpool, and the result could be national bankruptcy." He added, "We all need to find an inner courage to look to the future," before signing off with "God bless Iceland"—a phrase that, to his audience, was joltingly unfamiliar in a political context. The speech "was not what you would call a pleasant thing to do," Haarde said, in his office, a few weeks later. He had a dry, doctorly manner. He recalled going home beforehand, to prepare himself—"I hugged my wife and my daughters, put on a different tie"—and then driving to the studio. "It was emotional. It was emotional for a lot of people who were watching. People were astonished. They had not quite understood that something like this was happening to them."

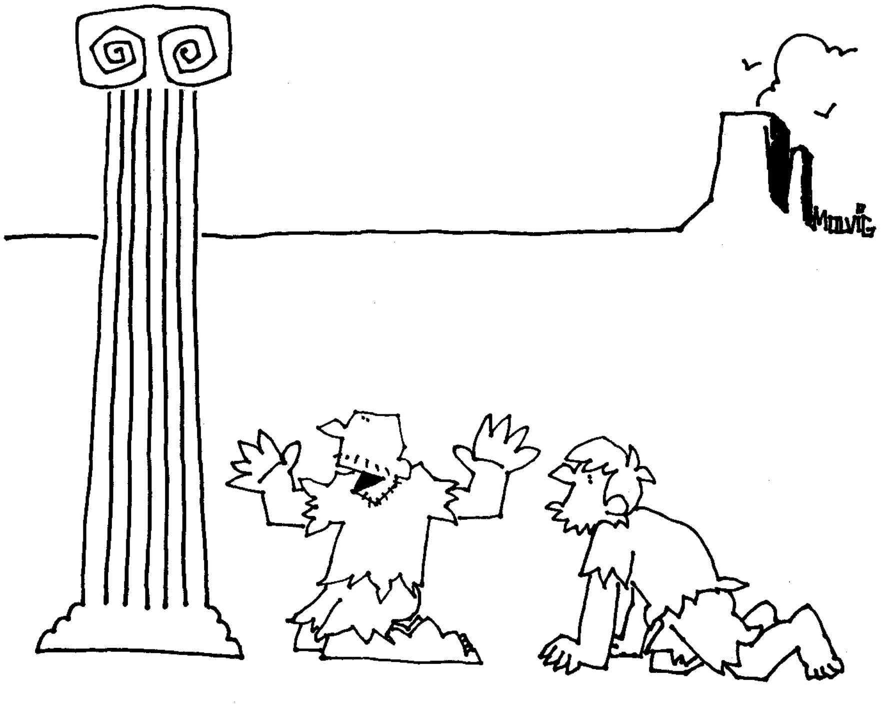
The Prime Minister's television address was a national punctuation mark. With this, Iceland formally brought to an end its giddy years of growth—an era now remembered for Range Rover traffic jams, and private parties featuring Elton John. Valgeir Valdimarsson, who until recently worked for the airline Iceland Express, compared it to the "dream season" on "Dallas." He said, "People were thinking, Wow, we're one of the richest countries in the world. Then they woke up." A former adviser to one of the failed banks told me that, in the boom years, "if you were planning a conference in Reykjavík, and asking, 'Who shall we invite as a keynote?,' it would always be, 'Oh, Bill Clinton.' And then, 'No, we can't have Clinton, because the other guys had him.' 'O.K., Warren Buffett. Jack Welch.' Always the most famous names." When I met Gunnar Smári Egilsson, who was formerly the editor of *Fréttabladid*, a daily newspaper part-owned by Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson—a young supermarket operator who became a key Icelandic mogul, with large British holdings—he remembered a visit to the United States during this period: "It was fifty-eight kronur to the dollar!" he said with a laugh. (At the time of our conversation, the rate was a hundred and forty-five.) "There was nothing in New York I couldn't buy. I bought so much I haven't needed to buy things since." He gestured toward a handsome brown coat from a store in SoHo. Meanwhile, Jóhannesson, the mogul, and his wife, Ingibjörg Pálmadóttir, bought a yacht called One O One (101 is the Zip Code for downtown Reykjavík, and the name of the hotel owned by Pálmadóttir), and, for twenty-four million dollars, a triplex on Gramercy Park.

Many Icelanders viewed all this with bemusement. "In most cases, people were quite proud of what was happening," Andri Snær Magnason, a leading Icelandic writer, said. ("Dreamland," his wry analysis of modern Iceland, has sold twenty thousand copies.) "But we didn't really understand it. A guy running twenty stores in Iceland suddenly had bought half the high street in London?" Iceland certainly had resources—fish stocks, geothermal power, a highly educated workforce, beguiling pop stars—but it was hard to understand how this had been leveraged into "luxury and vulgarity," as Magnason put it. Egill Helgason, a television presenter and blogger, said sarcastically to me one day, "Icelanders had found a way of doing business that was totally new in the world and totally different from everyone else. We had discovered alchemy!"

How did Iceland become rich? At the time, some found it helpful to look for explanations in Iceland's distant history. In 2006, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, Iceland's President—a post of limited power—gave a speech at a meeting of Icelandic historians in which he described the new investors, then building banks and taking over European airlines and department stores, as having "qualities we have inherited from our ancestors." Icelanders, he said, hold "the deep-rooted view that those who venture out into unknown territory deserve our honor, that crossing the sea and settling in a new country brings one admiration and respect." Boldness was in the blood; Icelanders had marauding experience.

"This Viking stuff is absolute myth, a post-factum way of describing reckless behavior," Gudmundur Hálfdánarson, a professor of history at the University of Iceland, recently said. He has studied the formation of Icelandic national identity, and when we met in his office—before dawn, at nine in the morning—he said that, though one can acknowledge the daring of Iceland's first medieval settlers, it's equally important to recognize that Iceland was "a fairly stagnant and poor peasant economy for much of its history . . . among the most docile and lethargic people in Europe." No towns, no bourgeoisie—instead, there was generation after generation of sheep farmers under Norwegian and then Danish rule, living lives that were much as Halldór Laxness, Iceland's Nobel Prize-winning author, described the life of Bjartur in "Independent People," his novel of one man's accommodation with unrelenting comfortlessness. When, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Iceland began to make its way toward independence from Denmark, the experience was more one of self-discovery than of revolt. "The rhetoric of Icelandic politics is steeped in the nationalist fiction of the 'struggle for independence,'" Hálfdánarson said. "I don't think the Danes were particularly sad to let us go."

Iceland became fully independent only in 1944, entering the second half of the twentieth century in what Magnason characterizes as a kind of defensive crouch. "This post-colonial generation, after we got independence, was always frustrated that, anywhere we went in the world, nobody knew Iceland existed. 'Iceland? What is that?' There was this kind of longing to be recognized, this longing to be a player." The country remained a provincial, highly regulated place of cod and political cronyism, best known interna-



"Civilization! We're saved."

tionally for hosting Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky, in 1972, and then Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1986. When Davíd Oddsson, of the center-right Independence Party, and a popular former mayor of Reykjavík, became Prime Minister, in 1991, the state managed nearly the entire banking sector, along with the travel agency and the printing plant. You had to show your plane ticket to buy foreign currency, and RÚV, the national broadcaster, had only a few years earlier ended its policy of showing no television at all on Thursdays.

When Iceland changed, one prominent figure was a libertarian professor of political philosophy at the University of Iceland named Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson—a free-market intellectual. "In a sense, I was one of the authors of this adventure," he said in Reykjavík, in December. We met the day after the ruckus at the Central Bank, in a bar of his choosing, which still had a pre-*kreppa* air. A lampshade the size of an igloo, designed by Philippe Starck, hung above our heads, and dance music by the Gap Band was playing at five in the afternoon.

I had learned that Gissurarson—whose blog takes you in one click to Edith Piaf singing "Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien"—was widely distrusted in Reykjavík. He had been described to me as the country's Karl Rove. (With little apparent annoyance, he told me that he had also once been called the country's Roy Cohn.) In 2001, Gissurarson published "How Can Iceland Become the Richest Country in the World?," entertaining the idea that Iceland could build an offshore financial economy akin to that of the Channel Islands. Margaret Thatcher is one of his great heroes—after a glass of wine, he imitated her voice precisely—and another is the libertarian philosopher Friedrich Hayek, the subject of his Oxford doctorate. Gissurarson was on the supervisory board of the Central Bank and described himself as a close friend of Davíd Oddsson, who was, he said, "as charming as Ronald Reagan but as tough and forceful as Mrs. Thatcher." (Oddsson declined to be interviewed.) Although he had never been a government official, Gissurarson was sufficiently accredited to have a story about joining Oddsson, when he was Prime Minister, on a visit to the Oval Office in 2004, and singing "Happy Birthday" to President George W. Bush.

CONTEMPLATION

I saw the fox squirrel sitting on the stand
of the sundial with the twig-shaped hand.
He sat still, his tail flung carelessly
forward over a shoulder. The make-do tree
overlooked bird feeder, lawn, and on this date
a flood of snow that seemed to sublimate.
A dim mist huddled by the scraggly wood;
I saw it mill about, precess, stir, rise. Could
we attribute to our squirrel some notion
predicated on, I don't know, image, motion,
of the strangeness of this mist above snow,
as if the sky were un-snowing from below?
Can we name him some beauty or bewilderment
to see the sharp fuzz and the near went,
to feel far brittle branches' caress and the press
of space nest into the mind? Intuit yes.

He clutches the twig-dial with little hands
like a helmsman prefiguring close lands.
His brain must be smaller than a walnut,
like his snow-footprints it must course its rut
from tree to tree to tree, from space to space,
along dip tense liquid pivot up bough, the race
and the swell of branch, dense push to earth,
paws spread-eagled on a big tree's girth.
Suppose he thinks trees the same way I dress.
God knows I don't conclude the sleeve, less
do I have a plan to remove a sweater.

I used to put on shirts, or dresses, better,
front to back, so I could seem them just
as they would look on me, just as I thrust
among their labyrinths. Dimly perplexed,
I was too involved in what would come next—
wearing the dress—to let one turn its back,
to wait, to hold foreknowledge in its track.

"Our dreams were of a free Iceland with a lot of opportunities for the common man to become rich," Gissurarson said. Starting in 1991, Iceland "liberalized the economy," he recalled. "We lowered the corporate tax rate from forty-five per cent to eighteen per cent, and the marginal tax rate for individuals from forty-seven per cent to thirty-six. We really created a very business-friendly tax environment." The government brought Iceland into the European Economic Area—which meant entering into trade agreements of the European Union without joining the club—and this encouraged the offshore activities of Icelandic companies. (Crucially, Oddsson and Haarde opposed full membership in the E.U. and any thought of giving up the national currency, the krona.) "We privatized the banks, the telephone company, the fish-processing plants," Gissurarson said. "It was a bit like the Thatcherite revolution in the United Kingdom. Did this bring about the collapse of the Icelandic economy? I don't think so, because what we simply did was turn Iceland into a free society. I don't think the system can be blamed."

Another thing, when I was very small,
at eight after the amber lamp in the hall
was switched off, when the night-light shone,
I used to feel one of my digits grown
massive but weightless, a toe on the loom,
waxing, palpitating frontiers of the room.
Then obscurely it would erase, vaguely forgot.
I seem to remember it happening a lot.
I remember doing things I didn't understand,
"taking notes" on Marco Polo in Samarkand,
clasping hands in prayer in kindergarten.
I heard names—Richelieu and Spartan—
with no meaning other than what I felt:
a quickening of the pulse, a rufous pelt
pinned with the soft gurgle of mother-of-pearl,
a brick cathedral, an oil-spill whorl;
something else angular and red-yellow,
emanating the pre-sound of sounding hollow.

The squirrel sitting on the primitive clock
is stuck between no hard place and no rock,
he changes and is morphous like the fog,
like the sundial he swoops, he has no cog,
no pause. He feels his tail hair on his fur,
he knows of numbness in his toes, the slur
of a breeze by his flank, and the warm
instantiatedness of insides. The form
of things drifts, particulates, rushes,
opaquifies, holds its breath, teeters, blows, hushes.
The squirrel feels out half-assumed stances,
tentative conjoined smells, small knit trances.
These sensations come to a head, to nought,
and the fox squirrel, innocent of thought,
stirs over his strange white domain, impels
his tiny realm from now to what now foretells.

—*Meredith Root-Bernstein*

In 2003, in a less than perfectly transparent—some say "Russian"—manner, Iceland completed the process of privatizing the state banks. In 2004, Oddsson was happy to note that Iceland's new banks had begun expanding overseas: "This is a very positive development which shows beyond all doubt the enormous force unleashed when the state entrusts individuals with freedom of action." The following year, he became chair of the board of governors of the Central Bank—an unimaginable move *in almost any other political system.*

The Central Bank had inflation control as its mandated priority. Thanks in part to the huge investment in aluminum smelting, inflation was beginning to rise, and the Central Bank pushed up interest rates in response: a rate of 5.3 per cent, in 2003, rose to 14.25 per cent, in 2007. These rates caused money to pour into the country. This is the "carry trade": someone borrows in a place with a very low rate—Japan, say—then leaves the money in Iceland, in kronur, at ten per cent, and enjoys the difference. The result was that the krona, in high demand, rose in value on international markets, which gave Icelanders exaggerated economic assurance: they travelled the world, and shopped for coats in SoHo. And a high Icelandic interest rate did not, in fact, inhibit inflation, because—in the international credit boom the world was then experiencing—Icelanders found that they could easily borrow abroad, at lower rates. They took loans in foreign currencies to buy cars and homes. A housing bubble formed, and, when the krona later fell, the debts of Icelanders sometimes doubled in size. A young musician told me a typical story: he bought an apartment in 2003, sold it at twice the price in 2007, and bought a bigger place, borrowing in yen and Swiss francs. The crash raised his mortgage from two hundred thousand kronur a month to five hundred thousand (or more than forty-four hundred dollars). The house, if he could sell it, would cover no more than half of his debt. "But I think I did the right thing," he said. "You can't predict a force majeure. It's like saying it would have been unwise to go to Phuket before the tsunami."

So, high interest rates, ineffective against inflation, lured funds—"hot money"—that overvalued the krona. At the same time, the three main Icelandic banks—Kaupthing, Landsbanki, and Glitnir—and many of the businesses associated with them were leveraging themselves internationally. The distinction between these banks and their corporate clients is blurry: at the heart of Iceland's adventure was a small group of men and a fair amount of interconnectedness; and it's tempting, if not entirely just, to think of them as partners in a single giant national hedge fund. (Hannes Smárason, the former chairman of Icelandair's parent company, once compared the world of Icelandic business to the Medici family.) With little apparent fear of risk, and subject to imperfect regulatory supervision, the banks raised money in international markets and made it available to Icelandic clients who often invested overseas, notably in retail businesses in the U.K. and in Scandinavia.Jón Danielsson, an Icelandic economist at the London School of Economics, who has studied the crisis, recently used the phrase "institutional immaturity" to describe Iceland's banks. "They had no history, little experience," he said. "At the start, anything made a profit. None of the banks understood the riskiness of their strategy."

Among those who prospered was Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson, whose business ventures included Bónus, a chain of budget Icelandic supermarkets. (Its logo, a cross-eyed cartoon pig, is ubiquitous in Reykjavík.) Jóhannesson's domain extended into much of the Icelandic media, and into retail businesses such as Hamleys—the London toy store—and French Connection. His London office was decorated with a ten-foot Viking carrying a guitar. Jóhannesson had interests in Glitnir, but was also backed by the other banks. Björgólfur Thor Björgólfsson, generally understood to be Iceland's first dollar billionaire, and his father, Björgólfur Gudmundsson, made a fortune in Russian bottling and brewing, and, through one of their companies, bought nearly half of Landsbanki, the second-largest bank. Björgólfsson later expanded into Eastern European telecommunications. His father took over West Ham United, the British soccer club, for more than a hundred million dollars. Hannes Smárason, of Icelandair, whose business interests became entwined with those of Jóhannesson, led his company to acquire Sterling, a Danish airline. For most of 2007, that company was one of the largest stockholders in the parent company of American Airlines. In a largely classless society, "we suddenly had this super class of billionaires, of super-rich," Magnason said. "The Parliament, the government, became quite small compared to the billionaires." On the Icelandic exchange, stocks rose by a factor of nine in six years. Newspaper headlines in London talked of "THE LITTLE ISLAND THAT TOOK ON THE WORLD." Money flowed into Icelandic arts. "There was a kind of sexual relationship between banking and the young hip artist generation," Magnason said. And, for the first time, one could have a career in Iceland as a bodyguard.

The economy felt a tremor in 2006; and, with credit supplies tightening, the banks made more of an effort to raise money the old-fashioned way—by attracting depositors. Landsbanki's Icesave, a high-interest online savings bank, soon accumulated some three hundred thousand accounts in the U.K.

"It was a warning in 2006, and we beat it, and then felt unbeatable," Egilsson, the newspaperman who worked for Jóhannesson, said. In 2007, at the start of the global credit crunch, the Icelandic banks were not weighed down by weird securitized assets, but they were big—many would say irresponsibly so—and Iceland was tiny. The country had one of the smallest freely floating currencies in the world, and, before the crash, the banks had outgrown the national economy by at least nine hundred per cent. (In 2007, the equivalent figure in America was eighty-one per cent.) By the start of 2008, it had become clear that international investors were rattled, that they would not be renewing their lending, and that a great deal of money would be flowing out of the country. Hedging against the krona's anticipated fall, Icelandic banks, like other investors, took positions against the currency—or, as Helgason, the broadcaster and blogger, put it, translating an Icelandic expression, "They pissed in their shoes." When the krona did fall, some detected underhandedness. It was reported, for example, that foreign hedge-fund managers had flown to Iceland and had bragged in the bar of the 101 Hotel about their plans to bet against the krona. But as one senior and unsentimental Icelandic financier put it to me, "If you're so vulnerable that five idiots from the East Coast, drunk in a bar, can destabilize the currency, then it's not a proper currency."

"We feel a bit betrayed by the oligarchs," Hannes Gissurarson said, referring to the new business class. "Because they went too far." There is little doubt that David Oddsson felt the same way. In a television interview last year, he called the bankers "reckless" and said, "What I find odd is when people feel mainly for the arsonists and attack the fire brigade." The vast new forces of international trade and finance now intersected disastrously with Iceland's experiment in market liberalization—one tempered by Scandinavian welfare traditions, but also insular and inexpert. Prime Minister Haarde, who had once served as Finance Minister, pointed to both areas of Icelandic vulnerability when he said to me, "We didn't foresee that the banks would then be operating in such an open international financial environment." He went on, "There was money all over the place, easily available and very cheap, so the banks helped themselves."

The Central Bank has been criticized for inaction: it could have contained the size of the banks by pushing for a raise in minimum-reserve requirements. It could have done more to build up its own foreign-currency reserves, which were low relative to the size of the banks. Professor Richard Portes, of London Business School, has argued that the Icelandic banks were fundamentally sound. He recently said, "All bankers are greedy. Adam Smith was pretty good on that." But, he went on, Iceland's Minister of Finance at the time, Árni Mathiesen, "and the governor of the bank are technically, strictly speaking, incompetent."

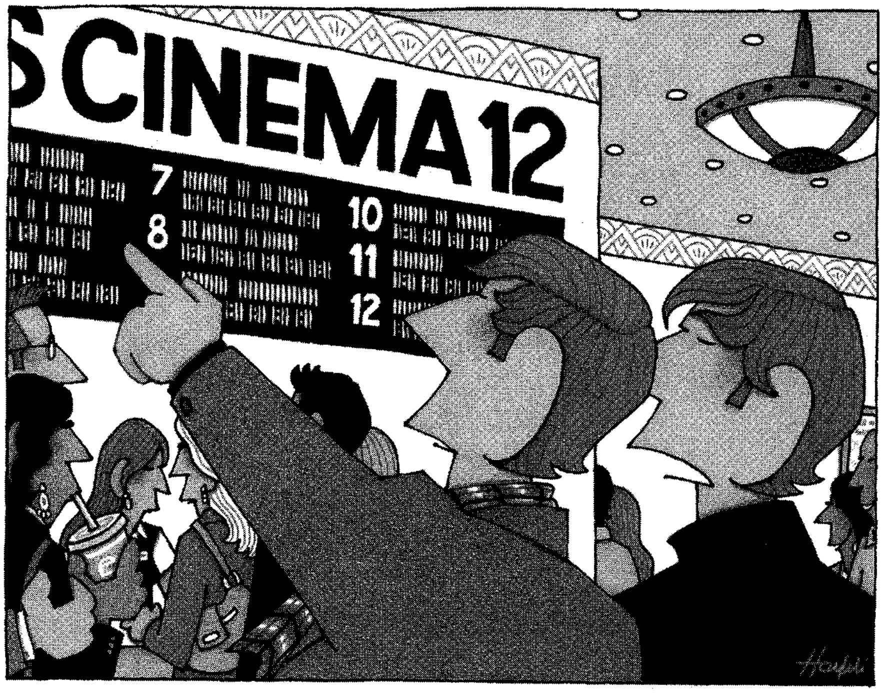
Lehman Brothers failed in mid-September, and banks around the world stopped lending to one another. Glitnir, the smallest of the main Icelandic banks, saw a liquidity crisis looming. The bank looked to the Icelandic authorities, who responded not with the requested loan but with a plan, announced on Septem-

"At least we have our integrity."

ber 29th, to buy seventy-five per cent of Glitnir's stock, at a knockdown price. That deal was never finished. Following the government's announcement, the krona fell, and credit lines disappeared. In a country with only three major banks, all are at risk if one is seen to falter. On Monday, October 6th, the Prime Minister delivered his alarming "God bless Iceland" address. On Tuesday, both Glitnir and Landsbanki were taken over by the government.

The same day, Alistair Darling, Britain's finance minister, had an awkward phone conversation with Árni Mathiesen, his Icelandic counterpart, who acknowledged that Iceland's deposit-insurance fund might not be able to protect Landsbanki's Icesave deposits. "Well, that is a terrible position to be in," Darling said. On Wednesday, Britain froze the assets of Landsbanki, under provisions of its Anti-terrorism, Crime, and Security Act; this briefly put Landsbanki alongside Al Qaeda, Zimbabwe, and North Korea on a British government Web site. The U.K. Treasury has since said repeatedly that Landsbanki was in no way considered to be a terrorist organization. But Prime Minister Haarde, still angry, told me that for Iceland to have been put in the company of terrorists and "renegade states" was "totally unacceptable." (Iceland ultimately agreed to compensate the U.K.'s Icesave customers, a commitment expected to cost several billion dollars.) In a separate action on the same day, Britain put the U.K. subsidiary of Kaupthing into administration, saying that the bank was likely to default on its depositors. Kaupthing could not survive this blow, and the following day was taken over by the Icelandic authorities.

Within a few days, three banks, representing eighty-five per cent of Iceland's banking sector, had collapsed. The krona had fallen more than forty per cent against the dollar since the start of the year, and on October 14th, when the Icelandic exchange reopened after a three-day suspension, stocks fell by seventy-seven per cent. And the country faced a financial burden of at least fourteen billion dollars.

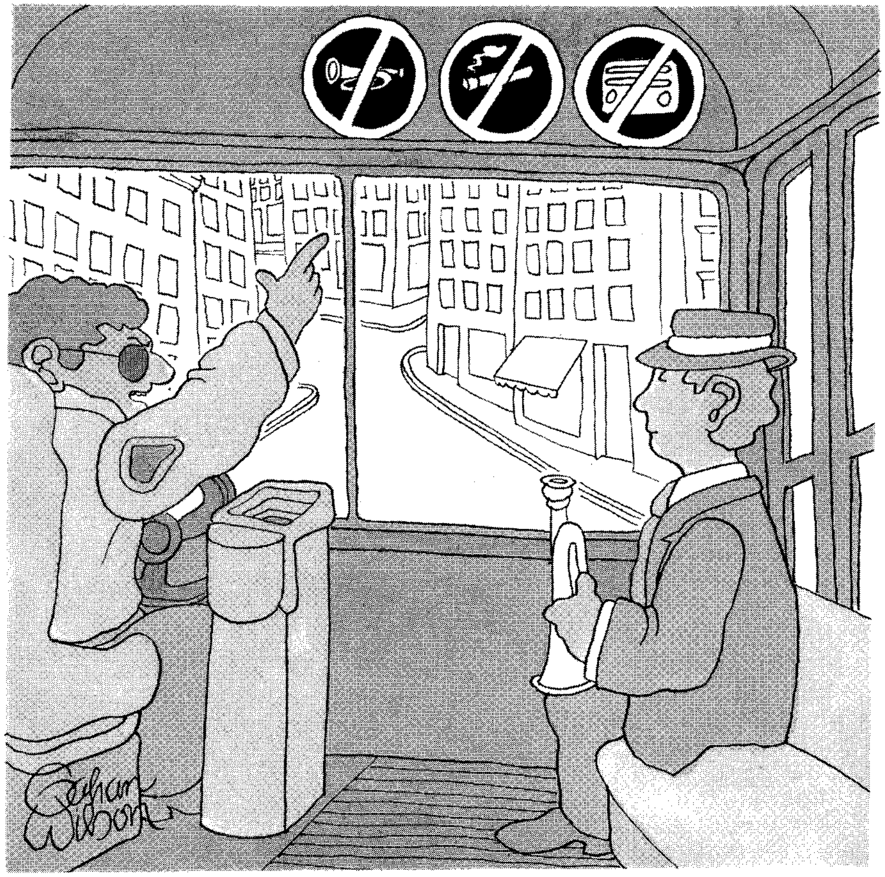


"Not another movie about straight people in love. I'm sick of extrapolating."

Earlier this winter, a young married couple from New York—an American doctoral student in social psychology at Columbia, and an Icelandic composer—spent a long weekend in Reykjavík, looking to buy a suddenly affordable second home, not quite sure if they were taking advantage of the country, playing a noble part in its restoration, or perhaps both. The housing market had fallen so far that, when they called to arrange viewings, one seller was "almost crying with happiness," Alexandra Suppes, the social psychologist, told me. I went apartment-hunting with them one afternoon, and heard an affable real-estate agent say, with mock-avidity, "So, an offer *tomorrow*? In dollars? Green dollars?" Everyone laughed, and he repeated the joke later, and then again, until the pleading was largely stripped of irony.

On another visit, with a different real-estate agent, we drove out of Reykjavík's center to where the roads widen, the buildings are taller and more modern, and where Kaupthing has its headquarters. (Magnason called this the "Boulevard of Broken Dreams.") In a top-floor apartment in an unfinished building, a balcony door led out onto nothing. As the would-be buyers from New York looked around, murmuring, I talked to the agent, who said that in 2007 he bought a house in North Carolina, where his son is in college. Because of emergency currency restrictions, he now found that in order to pay his U.S. mortgage he was having to buy dollars on the black market in Reykjavík, and send them abroad under plain cover. Living in Iceland after the crash, he said, "is like being at a big funeral. Nobody speaks. Nobody knows what's happening. All you know is someone died."

There was some life yet in Reykjavík, including the proud tradition of immoderate weekend drinking. Late into the night, bars were full of heaving, swaying bonhomie, like a tavern in a hammy production of "Henry IV"—this followed by a lot of subzero socializing on the sidewalk. A Sunday-morning walk down Reykjavík's main shopping street was accompanied by the sound of crunching glass underfoot. But on the same street the window of an optician's store was filled by a portrait of Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, framed by angry slogans, to which someone had added a Hitler mustache—the list of renegades had not been forgiven. And, a few doors down, a store was selling T-shirts with an outline of Iceland and the words, in English, "Banana Republic No. 1." (In a similar spirit of ironic self-laceration, a Web site called New Iceland, owing something to *The Onion*, had launched with such head-



"That means you, pal!"

• •

lines as "'It's Tempting, Very': Prime Minister Haarde on Selling National Treasure Björk to a Bulgarian Circus.")

At home in an airy Reykjavík apartment with polished wooden floors, a middle-aged couple—a port official and a teacher—reported with impressive equanimity that the Austrian hotel that they had booked for a skiing holiday had e-mailed to cancel their reservation, on the ground of nationality alone. Elsewhere, a music student explained that she felt newly isolated from the rest of Europe, given the sudden impossibility of visits to London or Dublin. "If this goes on, I will feel on the moon," she said.

And a recently unemployed plumber, who remembered the era just past as one of marble bathtubs weighing a ton, was about to be married and thinking of emigration: "It would take a miracle to keep us here. I've heard good things about Australia." He spoke with a recklessness that I'd heard in others: financial decorum had been abandoned. He was thinking of taking new loans, then leaving Iceland with his debts unpaid. He had been in an unemployment office the previous day, and the scene was so depressing that, he said, "I was almost in tears as I left." He laughed. "If I wasn't so manly, I would have been crying in the car." At the Icelandic Red Cross, Katla Thorsteinsdóttir said that the number of calls to a help line for people feeling down, or suicidal, had risen by fifty per cent. Her own dismay was evident. "The only thing that I know is that I will be here tomorrow," she said.

But, in a society with national health care, low energy costs, and little real poverty, some Icelanders—even those with monstrous new debts—allowed themselves the luxury of a slow exhalation. The opposite of prosperity is not extinction. Iceland's street protests were a demand for political accountability and reform, but also a kind of declaration of demotion. Many Icelanders seemed encouraged by thoughts of a more austere, domestic, and less self-consciously potent national reputation. There was some talk of knitting. "I feel like I have Iceland back," Thorhallur Vilhjálmsson, of the interrupted Icelandic National Concert and Conference Center, told me.

One evening, I met a man in his thirties who had once had a powerful job in the arts in Reykjavík. A few years ago, he began to charge personal expenses on his company credit card. The habit grew—"I wanted to be able to do things, have dinners, buy champagne"—until he had slipped into "a kind of madness" of embezzlement. He was eventually exposed and convicted. His sentence included a month in prison in Reykjavík, which he described as "a pretty positive experience, kind of like some people take a vacation in a monastery to clear the mind." He exercised, lost fifteen pounds, and read the works of Thórbergur Thórdarson, a twentieth-century experimental writer and a champion of Esperanto. (The prisoner was also able to join the Wi-Fi network of the café next door to the jail.) While at pains to emphasize the many differences between a just punishment for a crime and a national bankruptcy, the man drew a hesitant line between his experience and his country's: delusion, denial, followed by an upheaval that brought clarity—"a fundamental change in the most basic ground rules in your life." Or, as Andri Magnason said, "The people who couldn't understand how money could be created this way are relieved that it wasn't reality. It was true what your grandmother said: Don't owe too much, don't take risks, use things well."

Two months after the crash, nobody in government, at the Central Bank, or in Iceland's financial regulatory body had resigned, and the ruling Independence Party had managed to hold on to its parliamentary coalition partner, the Social Democrat Alliance. In Prime Minister Haarde's office, the only visible security was a middle-aged man in a checked shirt controlling a door buzzer. Haarde predicted "a big drop in G.D.P. We will have a big deficit in government finances. We have significant unemployment, which is something we are not used to, and of course inflation"—then approaching twenty per cent—"is way above where we would like to have it. And then we can go on: investment is down, consumption is down, and there will be an over-all drop in the purchasing power of families and wage earners." The I.M.F. had just approved a

$2.1-billion loan to Iceland, the first made to a Western country since Britain's embarrassment in the mid-seventies. Scandinavian countries were lending a similar amount. Haarde's party, long defined by its opposition to the E.U., was now mulling membership. "Everything is now open to review," he said.

I asked about the protests. They were "a phase that we will move through, and people will direct their attention to solving the problems," he said. "We're used to crises here. Natural disasters, regularly." He could not imagine a change in government. "I don't think that's reasonable or realistic or wise. We have an expression in Icelandic: 'If you are on a horse in the middle of a stream, don't switch horses.'"

In January, Parliament met for the first time following the Christmas recess. There had been weekly demonstrations in Iceland for three months—formal, if bitter, rallies, arranged around speeches. But there had also been looser, noisier occurrences—windows broken, yogurt thrown—sometimes at the edge of the organized gatherings, like the sit-in at the Central Bank, and a disturbance on New Year's Eve during which protesters cut through a cable carrying live television pictures of the annual gathering where political leaders discuss the year ahead over wine and spiced herring. On another occasion, Gudjón Heidar Valgardsson, the ski-mask protester, made front-page news when he hit Jóhannesson in the face with a snowball outside the 101 Hotel. "The police were there to protect him, so it was obviously a satirical act rather than a violent one," he explained to me in an e-mail. (The Baugur Group, Jóhannesson's investment company, has since been granted temporary protection from its creditors by a Reykjavík court.)

Toward the end of January, this more confrontational stance—choreographed on Facebook groups and by text message—had become an influence on the mainstream protest movement. And, when two thousand people met on January 20th, it was with the idea not of making speeches but of filling the area with noise that would be heard inside Parliament. Beneath posters referring to events occurring in Washington on the same day—"Yes we can!"—they beat on pots and pans. This was the start of a noisy week: an open-ended, roaming protest that the local press came to call the Kitchenware Revolution. "Or you could call it the Night of the Long Spoons," Magnason said. That first day, the police were pelted with foodstuffs (including "occasional trays of pasta," as *The Reykjavík Grapevine,* an English-language magazine, put it) and in return used pepper spray. A large Christmas tree, a gift from Norway, was set ablaze. The demonstrations, which went on into the evening, were "very tribal and high-spirited," Magnason said. This continued on a second day: Burning Man and Tiananmen, in about equal measure. The police used tear gas for the first time since 1949 (the issue then had been NATO membership). Some people in the crowd threw paving stones that injured police officers, and, according to Edward Huijbens, the geographer, this inspired "a general disgust and outrage" in the bulk of the crowd: protesters formed a barrier between the delinquents and the police. On the third day, protesters who identified themselves as nonviolent wore orange ribbons.

At a press conference on Friday, four days into the disturbance, Prime Minister Haarde announced that he had been given a diagnosis of esophageal cancer, and did not intend to seek reëlection as chairman of the Independence Party. He added that the Party supported holding elections this spring.

Iceland's government survived for one more weekend. On Saturday, the regular weekend demonstration drew seven thousand: a proportional crowd in the United States would be seven million. The coalition government collapsed on Monday, after the Social Democrats demanded the post of Prime Minister as the price of continued support. The global economic crisis had by then inspired nationwide protests in France, riots in Latvia, and strikes over immigrant workers in Britain. It had now brought down its first government. On February 1st, Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir, a widely trusted, left-wing, and gay member of Parliament, became Prime Minister of Iceland, heading a new coalition led by the Social Democrats.

Davíd Oddsson, whose term at the Central Bank ran until 2012, was still in place. The new Prime Minister had no power to remove him, but on her second day in office she invited him to resign. Oddsson's blustering reply arrived a week later. "I have never abandoned any task that I have agreed to take on, and I do not intend to do so now," he wrote.

Oddsson held on. "The father of the nation has become the madman on the roof," Magnason said a week ago. An Icelandic television comedy show portrayed Oddsson as moving around Reykjavík disguised in a wig and pushing a stroller. Then, last Thursday, Parliament passed a bill to reform the leadership structure of the Central Bank, and Oddsson's job was abolished. He left the bank that day, after making a farewell speech to the staff and receiving a round of applause. An interim head of the bank was appointed—Svein Harald Øygard, a Norwegian.

In B5, the empty and fashionable bar, Hannes Gissurarson, the author of "How Can Iceland Become the Richest Country in the World?," had said, "Ten to fifteen guys overreached themselves, they were out of control. But that is not the cause of the collapse." The primary causes, in Gissurarson's opinion, were the international credit crunch, the treachery of Gordon Brown—the "schoolyard bully"—and the failure of the European Central Bank to show Iceland support.

He also said, as if the thought were occurring to him for the first time, that it may be that "some of us are to blame indirectly, because we created a climate in which the entrepreneur was applauded. The businessman, the guy who takes over companies, asset-stripping—he was a hero in Icelandic folklore that was created by some of us who strongly supported the free market." He went on, "Indirectly, I take some blame for it, but, if you think about it, it's not my fault. It's the fault of the left-wing intellectuals, who should have been giving a counter-view!" He added, "You can't blame people for their successes—you have to blame those who fail. We were too successful with the free-market philosophy."

As we spoke, a white stretch Hummer slid past the window. Since October, Gissurarson said, "people at the university who think that I have been too successful at whispering into the ear of a prince, they are now trying to settle old scores with me. One shouted, 'Resign, you devil!' in the corridor. Extraordinary."

Had it suited Iceland to be rich? "Very much so," Gissurarson said. "It was a hell of a good ride. Yes, it was." ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

THE UNFINISHED

David Foster Wallace's struggle to surpass "Infinite Jest."

BY D. T. MAX

The writer David Foster Wallace committed suicide on September 12th of last year. His wife, Karen Green, came home to find that he had hanged himself on the patio of their house, in Claremont, California. For many months, Wallace had been in a deep depression. The condition had first been diagnosed when he was an undergraduate at Amherst College, in the early eighties; ever since, he had taken medication to manage its symptoms. During this time, he produced two long novels, three collections of short stories, two books of essays and reporting, and "Everything and More," a history of infinity. Depression often figured in his work. In "The Depressed Person," a short story about an unhappy narcissistic young woman—included in Wallace's 1999 collection, "Brief Interviews with Hideous Men"—he wrote, "Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac, Tofranil, Wellbutrin, Elavil, Metrazol in combination with unilateral ECT (during a two-week voluntary inpatient course of treatment at a regional Mood Disorders clinic), Parnate both with and without lithium salts, Nardil both with and without Xanax. None had delivered any significant relief from the pain and feelings of emotional isolation that rendered the depressed person's every waking hour an indescribable hell on earth." He never published a word about his own mental illness.

Wallace's death was followed by four public memorial services, celebrations of his work in newspapers and magazines, and tributes on the Web. He was only forty-six when he killed himself, which helped explain the sense of loss readers and critics felt. There was also Wallace's outsized passion for the printed word at a time when it looked like it needed champions. His novels were overstuffed with facts, humor, digressions, silence, and sadness. He conjured the world in two-hundred-word sentences that mixed formal diction and street slang, technicalese and plain speech; his prose slid forward with a controlled lack of control that mimed thought itself. "What goes on inside is just too fast and huge and all interconnected for words to do more than barely sketch the outlines of at most one tiny little part of it at any given instant," he wrote in "Good Old Neon," a story from 2001. Riffs that did not fit into his narrative he sent to footnotes and endnotes, which he liked, he once said, because they were "almost like having a second voice in your head."

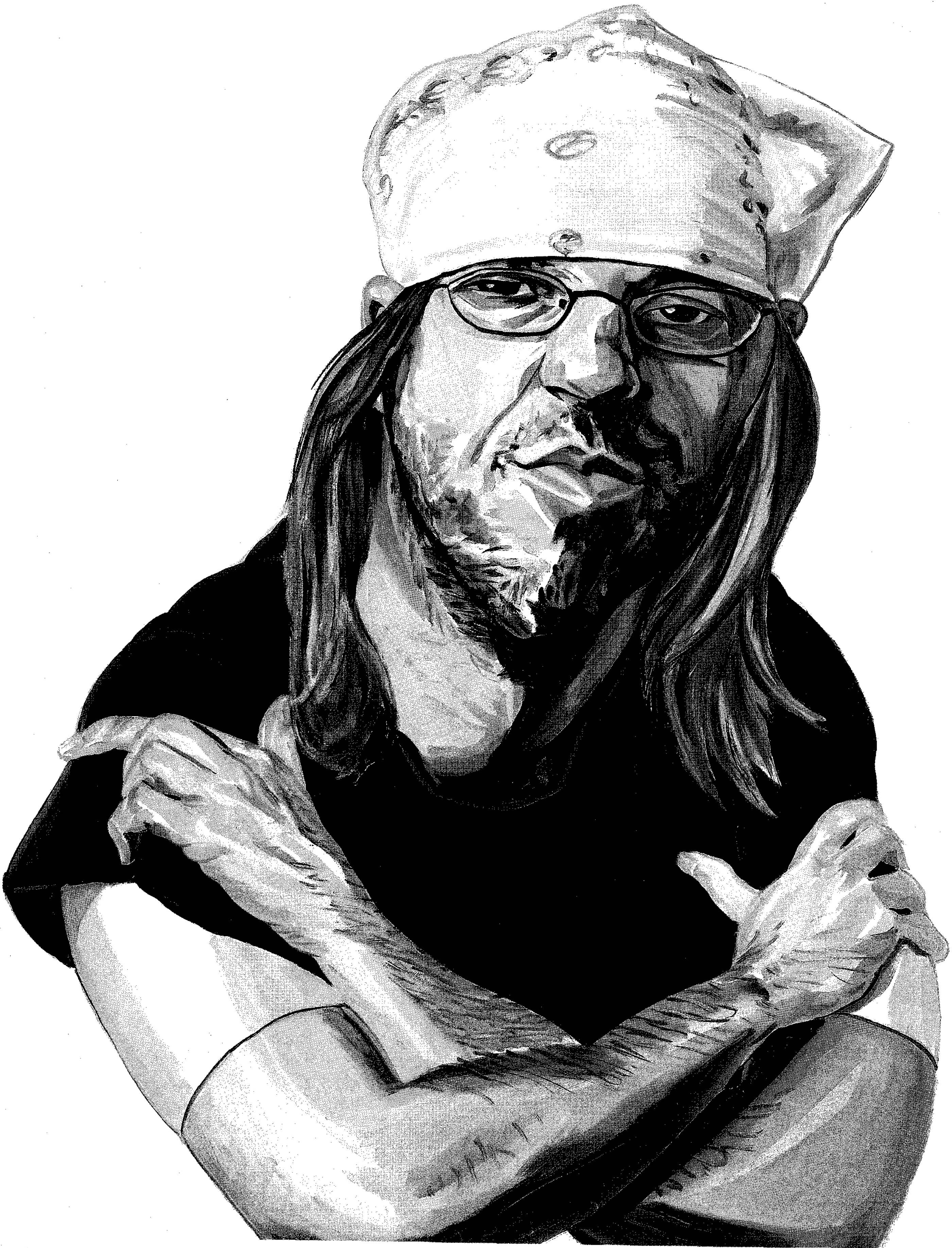
The sadness over Wallace's death was also connected to a feeling that, for all his outpouring of words, he died with his work incomplete. Wallace, at least, never felt that he had hit his target. His goal had been to show readers how to live a fulfilled, meaningful life. "Fiction's about what it is to be a fucking human being," he once said. Good writing should help readers to "become less alone inside." Wallace's desire to write "morally passionate, passionately moral fiction," as he put it in a 1996 essay on Dostoyevsky, presented him with a number of problems. For one thing, he did not feel comfortable with any of the dominant literary styles. He could not be a realist. The approach was "too familiar and anesthetic," he once explained. Anything comforting put him on guard. "It seems important to find ways of reminding ourselves that most 'familiarity' is meditated and delusive," he said in a long 1991 interview with Larry McCaffery, an English professor at San Diego State. The default for Wallace would have been irony—the prevailing tone of his generation. But, as Wallace saw it, irony could critique but it couldn't nourish or redeem. He told McCaffery, "Look, man, we'd probably most of us agree that these are dark times, and stupid ones, but do we need fiction that does nothing but dramatize how dark and stupid everything is?"

So Wallace's project required him to invent a language and a stance of his own. "I want to author things that both restructure worlds and make living people feel stuff," he wrote to his editor Michael Pietsch while he was working on his second novel, "Infinite Jest," which Little, Brown published in 1996. He knew that such proclamations made him seem a holy fool. In the interview with McCaffery, he said, "It seems like the big distinction between good art and so-so art lies . . . in be[ing] willing to sort of die in order to move the reader, somehow. Even now I'm scared about how sappy this'll look in print, saying this. And the effort to actually to do it, not just talk about it, requires a kind of courage I don't seem to have yet." He also said, "All the attention and engagement and work you need to get from the reader can't be for your benefit; it's got to be for hers."

One of the great pleasures in reading Wallace is to watch him struggle to give the reader her due. His first novel, "The Broom of the System," published in 1987, tells of a young woman who worries that she might exist only as a character in a story. The book suggests that the world should not be taken too seriously: life is an intellectual game, and words are the pieces on the board. The problem for Wallace, as he reflected after its publication, was that "Broom" offered an analysis but derided even the idea of a solution. In a 1989 letter to the novelist Jonathan Franzen, a friend, Wallace said that "Broom" felt as if it had been written by "a very smart fourteen-year-old."

"Infinite Jest," which came out almost a decade after "Broom," was a vast investigation into America as the land of addictions: to television, to drugs, to loneliness. The book comes to center on a halfway-house supervisor named Don Gately, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, who, with great effort, resists these entice-

PHILIP BURKE



Wallace worried that he had been driven by a "basically vapid urge to be avant-garde . . . and linguistically calisthenic."

ments. "What's unendurable is what his own head could make of it all," Gately thinks near the end. "But he could choose not to listen." Through the example of Gately, "Infinite Jest" offered readers an oblique form of counsel, but Wallace had mixed feelings about the book. The critic James Wood cited "Infinite Jest" as representative of the kind of fiction dedicated to the "pursuit of vitality at all costs." At times, Wallace felt the same way. "I'm sad and empty as I always am, when I finish something long," Wallace wrote to Franzen, shortly before the book's publication. "I don't think it's very good—some clipping called a published excerpt feverish and not entirely satisfying, which goes a long way toward describing the experience of writing the thing."

Wallace began to doubt the aspect of his work that many readers admired most: his self-consciously maximalist style. He was known for endlessly fracturing narratives and for stem-winding sentences adorned with footnotes that were themselves stem-winders. Such techniques originally had been his way of reclaiming language from banality, while at the same time representing all the caveats, microthoughts, meta-moments, and other flickers of his hyperactive mind. Wallace's approach reminded the reader that what he was reading was invented—the final work of constructing a moral world was his. But after "Infinite Jest" Wallace came to feel that his prose was too often arch and arid. Without capitulating to realism, he wanted to tell his stories in a more straightforward way.

From 1997 on, Wallace worked on a third novel, which he never finished—the "Long Thing," as he referred to it with Michael Pietsch. His drafts, which his wife found in their garage after his death, amount to several hundred thousand words, and tell of a group of employees at an Internal Revenue Service center in Illinois, and how they deal with the tediousness of their work. The partial manuscript—which Little, Brown plans to publish next year—expands on the virtues of mindfulness and sustained concentration. Properly handled, boredom can be an antidote to our national dependence on entertainment, the book suggests. As Wallace noted at a 2005 commencement speech at Kenyon College, true freedom "means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed." By then, Wallace had become convinced that the literary contortions for which he was known had become an impediment to this message. Franzen says of Wallace, "There was a certain kind of effulgent writing that he just wasn't interested in doing anymore." In the new novel, a character comments, "Maybe dullness is associated with psychic pain, because something that's dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that is always there, if only in an ambient low-level way, and which most of us spend nearly all our time and energy trying to distract ourselves from."

Wallace was trying to write differently, but the path was not evident to him. "I think he didn't want to do the old tricks people expected of him," Karen Green, his wife, says. "But he had no idea what the new tricks would be." The problem went beyond technique. The central issue for Wallace remained, as he told McCaffery, how to give "CPR to those elements of what's human and magical that still live and glow despite the times' darkness." He added, "Really good fiction could have as dark a worldview as it wished, but it'd find a way both to depict this world and to illuminate the possibilities for being alive and human in it."

In the late eighties, doctors had prescribed Nardil for Wallace's depression. Nardil, an antidepressant developed in the late fifties, is a monoamine oxidase inhibitor that is rarely given for long periods of time, because of its side effects, which include low blood pressure and bloating. Nardil can also interact badly with many foods. One day in the spring of 2007, when Wallace was feeling stymied by the Long Thing, he ate at a Persian restaurant in Claremont, and afterward he went home ill. A doctor thought that Nardil might be responsible. For some time, Wallace had come to suspect that the drug was also interfering with his creative evolution. He worried that it muted his emotions, blocking the leap he was trying to make as a writer. He thought that removing the scrim of Nardil might help him see a way out of his creative impasse. Of course, as he recognized even then, maybe the drug wasn't the problem; maybe he simply *was* distant, or maybe boredom was too hard a subject. He wondered if the novel was the right medium for what he was trying to say, and worried that he had lost the passion necessary to complete it.

That summer, Wallace went off the antidepressant. He hoped to be as drug free as Don Gately, and as calm. Wallace would finish the Long Thing with a clean brain. He entered this new period of life with what Franzen calls "a sense of optimism and a sense of terrible fear." He hoped to be a different person and a different writer. "That's what created the tension," Franzen recalls. "And he didn't make it."

David Wallace was born in 1962, in Ithaca, New York. His father, James, was a graduate student in philosophy. When David was three, his father took a job at the University of Illinois, in Urbana. His mother, Sally, was an English teacher. Wallace and his sister, Amy, who was two years younger, grew up in a home with language at its center. On a car trip when David was four, the family agreed to substitute "3.14159" for every mention of the word "pie" in their conversation. If there was no word for a thing, Sally Wallace invented it: "greebles" meant little bits of lint, especially those which feet brought into bed; "twanger" was the word for something whose name you don't know or can't remember.

Wallace was encouraged and pushed by his parents. "This was the kind of family where the mother would bring home the Encyclopædia Britannica for the family to read through," the novelist Mark Costello, who roomed with Wallace at Amherst, says. When Wallace was twelve, he was one of two winners of a local poetry contest. "Did you know that rats breed there? / That garbage is their favorite lair," David wrote of a polluted creek nearby. He used the fifty-dollar prize to help pay for tennis camp. He was an awkward child but competitive, and he became a very good tennis player, ranked in the junior Midwest division. One summer, he taught children in the Urbana Parks program. The penalty for botching shots was that Wallace would recount chapters from his life. They were all made up.

His family and teachers realized

that David was exceptional. "He was just going to hoover everything," his mother said. But he was soon struggling with mental and emotional difficulties. In his senior year of high school, he began carrying a towel around with him to wipe away the perspiration from anxiety attacks, and a tennis racquet, so that no one commented on the towel. "He was purposely hiding the attacks, I think," his father says. "He was very ashamed of it." During this time, David applied to Amherst, where his father had gone, and was accepted. Before Wallace left for college, he took a long walk through the cornfields, to say goodbye to the Midwest.

At Amherst, he was soon drawn to math and philosophy. He relished the "special sort of buzz" that they provided, as he later told McCaffery: "These moments appeared in proof-completions, or maybe algorithms. Or like a gorgeously simple solution to a problem you suddenly see after half a notebook with gnarly attempted solutions." Wallace joined the debate and glee clubs, and smoked a lot of pot with friends. One day, though, toward the end of his sophomore year, Costello walked into their dorm room to find Wallace sitting alone, slumped over, his gray Samsonite suitcase between his legs, a Chicago Bears cap on his head. "I have to go home," he told Costello. "Something's wrong with me."

His family was surprised by his return. "We didn't press him," his mother says. "We figured if he wanted to talk about it he'd talk about it." For a short time, he drove a school bus. He also found a psychiatrist and began taking antidepressants. During this time, he traced his breakdown to his not really wanting to be a philosopher. "I had kind of a midlife crisis at twenty, which probably doesn't augur well for my longevity," he later told McCaffery.

He began to write fiction. Until then, Wallace had seen novels primarily as a pleasurable way to get information. (Even in later years, he admired the novels of Tom Clancy for their ability to pack in facts.) But he realized that fiction could order experience as well as philosophy could, and also provide some of the same comfort. During this time, he wrote several short stories, one of which was published. "The Planet Trillaphon" appeared in the *Amherst Review* in 1984. The autobiographical story captures the intense pain of the depression he suffered:

> I'm not incredibly glib, but I'll tell what I think the Bad Thing is like. . . . Imagine that every single atom in every single cell in your body is sick . . . intolerably sick. And every proton and neutron in every atom . . . swollen and throbbing, off-color, sick, with just no chance of throwing up to relieve the feeling. Every electron is sick, here, twirling off-balance and all erratic in these funhouse orbitals that are just thick and swirling with mottled yellow and purple poison gases, everything off balance and woozy. Quarks and neutrinos out of their minds and bouncing sick all over the place.

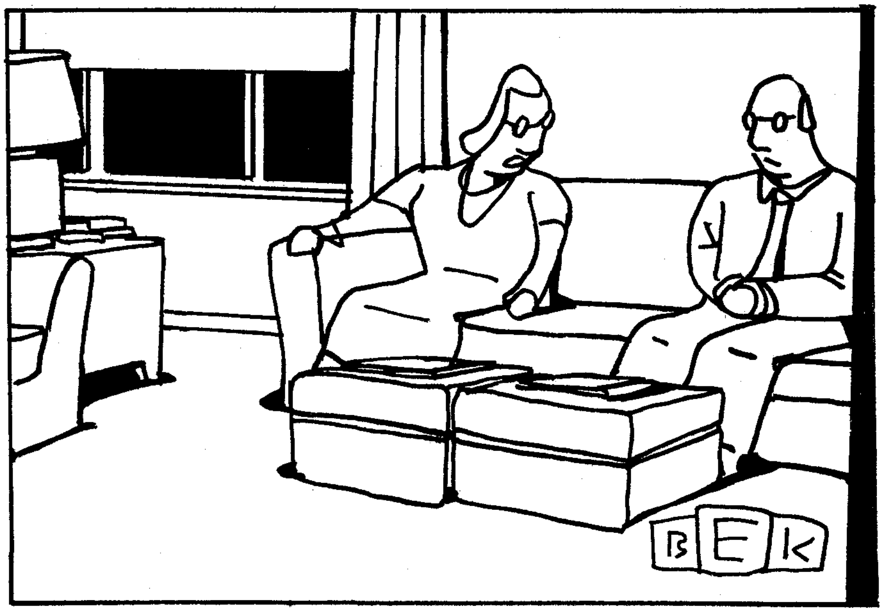
When he returned to school, Wallace took his first creative-writing class, and began aggressively reading contemporary fiction. He was drawn to the postmodernists, whose affection for puzzles and mirrors-within-mirrors sensibility reflected his own enthusiasm for math and philosophy. Costello remembers, "Junior year, David and I were sitting around talking about magical realists—I think it was 'One Hundred Years of Solitude'—and someone said, 'Pynchon's much cooler.' We said 'Who?' He threw a copy of 'Lot 49' at us. For Dave, that was like Bob Dylan finding Woody Guthrie." Wallace also loved Don DeLillo's "White Noise," which came out when he was a senior.

That same year, Wallace began his novel "The Broom of the System." A remark from an old girlfriend had stuck in his mind. He later wrote to Gerald Howard, the book's editor, that "she said that she would rather be a character in a piece of fiction than a real person. I got to wondering just what the difference was."

Wallace wrote most of the nearly five hundred pages of "Broom" during the second semester. He took his deadpan dialogue from DeLillo and his character names and attitude of paranoia from Pynchon. His protagonist is Lenore Stonecipher Beadsman; her boyfriend is Rick Vigorous, an Amherst graduate and the director of the publishing firm Frequent & Vigorous. Beadsman's great-grandmother, a disciple of Wittgenstein, has mysteriously disappeared from her nursing home. The atmosphere of ontological uncertainty that pervades the book is Wallace's dramatization of the ideas of Wittgenstein. Yet there was a tumble and urgency to his writing that broke free of this philosophical anchor. Rick Vigorous thinks about Lenore's great-grandmother:

> Apparently she was some sort of phenomenon in college and won a place in graduate study at Cambridge . . . but in any event there she studied . . . under a mad crackpot . . . who believed that everything was words. Really. If your car would not start, it was apparently to be understood as a language problem. If you were unable to love, you were lost in language. Being constipated equaled being clogged with linguistic sediment.

In September, 1985, Wallace mailed a chapter of "Broom" to a literary agency in San Francisco. In a cover letter, he



"You know, we actually only ever use two per cent of our fat asses."

"These new regulations will fundamentally change the way we get around them."

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noted coyly that he was roughly the same age as Bret Easton Ellis and David Leavitt—"whose fiction has done well partly because of readers' understandable interest in new, young writing." A new associate at the agency, Bonnie Nadell, loved the chapter, and took Wallace on as her first client. Three months later, she sold the manuscript to Gerald Howard, of Penguin Books, which had started a line of contemporary novels in paperback. In a letter to Howard, Wallace explained that "Broom" wasn't "realistic, and it is not metafiction; if it's anything, it's meta-the-difference-between-the-two." In the McCaffery interview, he described "Broom" as covert autobiography, "the sensitive tale of a sensitive young WASP who's just had this midlife crisis that's moved him from coldly cerebral analytic math to a coldly cerebral take on fiction . . . which also shifted his existential dread from a fear that he was just a 98.6°F calculating machine to a fear that he was nothing but a linguistic construct."

The editing went smoothly. In a letter to Howard, Wallace had promised to be "neurotic and obsessive" but "not too intransigent or defensive." But they disagreed on how "Broom" should end. Howard felt that the text called for some sort of resolution; Wallace did not think so. Howard urged him to keep in mind "the physics of reading"—or, as Wallace came to understand the phrase, "a whole set of readers' values and tolerances and capacities and patience-levels to take into account when the gritty business of writing stuff for others to read is undertaken." In other words, a reader who got through a long novel like "Broom" deserved a satisfying ending. Wallace was not so confident a writer as to simply ignore Howard's suggestion; as he wrote to Howard, he didn't want his novel to be like "Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog' . . . Ayn Rand or late Günter Grass, or Pynchon at his rare worst"—books that gave pleasure only to their authors. Yet when he tried to write a proper conclusion, "in which geriatrics emerge, revelations revelationize, things are cleared up," the words felt wrong to him. "I am young and confused and obsessed with certain problems that I think right now distill the experience of being human," he wrote to Howard. Reality was fragmented, and so his book must be, too. In the end, he broke the novel off midsentence: "I'm a man of my"

Howard was won over by Wallace's ending, and felt that "Broom" was remarkable, a "portent for the future of American fiction." He says, "It wasn't just a style but a feeling he was expressing, one of playful exuberance . . . tinged with a self-conscious self-consciousness." The dominant style of the time was the minimalism of writers such as Raymond Carver and Ann Beattie. Bret Easton Ellis and Jay McInerney—chroniclers of disaffected youth—were an offshoot of this group. These writers were smart but withholding, their characters often bored with being bored. Wallace's voice was different. It projected, in Howard's words, "the sheer joy of a talent realizing itself." There was optimism in its despair, elation in its anomie.

"Broom" received varied reviews. Caryn James, in the *Times*, called the book "a manic human flawed extravaganza," and said that it reminded her of Pynchon's "V." But where James saw homage others saw derivativeness. They thought that Wallace was too eager to show how smart he was. They disliked the lack of an ending. Each negative review surprised and hurt Wallace. After reading a review from *Publishers Weekly*, Wallace wrote Howard, "The guy seemed downright angry at having been made to read the thing."

Yet "Broom" found an audience, selling almost twenty thousand paperback copies in its first year. Moreover, the book showed other writers that there was a space between the taut hermeticism of the minimalists and the postmodern trickery of John Barth and Robert Coover, whose main interest was in uncovering the struts and bolts of narrative fiction. From "Broom" would come a new strain of meta-the-difference writing—books such as Dave Eggers's "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius" and Zadie Smith's "White Teeth."

"Broom" was published while Wallace was in the second year of an M.F.A. program at the University of Arizona. Whereas he had once dressed like a Midwestern square, he now grew his hair long and wrapped his head in a bandanna. At Arizona, where realists dominated the faculty, Wallace found himself and his style unpopular. The day after he handed out copies of "Broom," he was upset to find one at the secondhand bookstore. All the same, he wrote easily, quickly finishing many of the stories for his first collection, "Girl with Curious Hair" (1989). The stories were more narrowly postmodern than "Broom," concerned with reality and the distorting effects of television and movies. "My Appearance" was about an actress who was nervous about going on David Letterman's show. "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way" was a parodic homage to John Barth's story "Lost in the Funhouse." Wallace came to feel that his professors at Arizona had been right—the stories were brittle and irritatingly clever. But at the time he was happy with them, and caught up in the pleasure of artistic creation. "Writing fiction takes me out of time," he said in his first interview, in *Arrival*, published when he was in Tucson. "That's probably as close to immortal as we'll ever get."

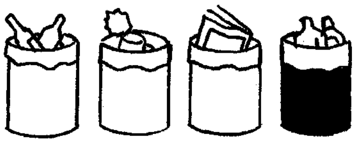
In the summer of 1987, Wallace finished his M.F.A. and moved into an apartment on the edge of Tucson. His mood worsened. "Curious Hair" was largely done, and he did not know what was next. "I think he was always afraid that the last thing he wrote would be the last thing he wrote," Amy Wallace, who is now a public defender, says. In late 1987, Wallace took a temporary job teaching creative writing at Amherst. He wrote to Bonnie Nadell that he was drinking a lot and, like Rick Vigorous, wandering around the campus "remembering disasters." He returned to Tucson; one day, he called home and said he was thinking of hurting himself. His mother flew to Tucson and helped him close up his apartment. They rented a U-Haul and took turns driving and reading aloud a Dean Koontz novel during the sixteen-hundred-mile trip home.

Back in Urbana, Wallace felt like a failure. "A lot of the trouble has to do with writing, but none of it with having stuff to send you, publications, or careers," he wrote to Nadell. "Nothing to do, really, with anything exterior to me." In another letter, he wrote, "My ambitions at this point are modest and mostly surround staying alive." One night, he and Amy watched "The Karen Carpenter Story," a maudlin TV movie about the singer, who died of a heart attack brought on by anorexia. When it was over, Wallace's sister, who was working on her own M.F.A., at the University of Virginia, told David that she had to drive back to Virginia. David asked her not to go. After she went, he tried to commit suicide with pills. He survived, and checked himself in to a psychiatric ward in Urbana, where he was given a course of electroconvulsive therapy. The experience horrified him, but he thought it helped. Wallace's mother remembers that David emerged as delicate as a child. "He would ask, 'How do you make small talk?' " his mother remembers. " 'How can you know which frying pan to pick out of the cupboard?' "

Wallace had decided that writing was not worth the risk to his mental health. He applied and was accepted as a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard. Philosophy was the only thing that had meant as much to him as writing. It, too, could trigger epiphanies. Harvard had offered him a scholarship, and academia would give him a more stable life, with health insurance.

At the time, Mark Costello was beginning a job as a lawyer in Boston. Wallace suggested that they rent an apartment together. In the spring of 1989, they moved into a dilapidated house in Somerville. "Boston is fun," Wallace wrote to Nadell in May, 1989, inviting her to visit. "We'll have laughs, listen to rap and James Brown." He was rebelling against the expectations that people had of him, drinking heavily and smoking a lot of marijuana.

"Girl with Curious Hair" came out in August, 1989, to mixed reviews and little attention. Wallace was heartbroken. "He thought he'd written a better book than 'Broom,' and then the publication was this big fat zero," Nadell recalls. And when Wallace began his studies at Harvard that fall, he was immediately disappointed. "The students did their professors' laundry and clustered around them, and he thought that was just ridiculous," James Wallace remembers. "He was a published author and expected to be treated as an equal." About a year after he had his breakdown in Tucson, Wallace called Costello from the psychiatric-services unit at Harvard, telling him that he had to go to the hospital again. An ambulance took Wallace to McLean, the psychiatric facility in nearby Belmont. There he was prescribed the drug Nardil for the first time. "We had a brief, maybe three-minute audience with the psychopharmacologist," his mother told *Rolling Stone*.



In December, Wallace was released and sent to a halfway house in Brighton, a run-down section of Boston. "It is a grim place, and I am grimly resolved to go there," he wrote to Nadell. He became serious about fighting his addictions. He participated in alcohol and narcotic rehabilitation programs. He replaced pot with cigarettes and, ultimately, with chewing tobacco, which he unsuccessfully tried to quit. Before his collapse, he had written observations in notebooks. He took this up again; Amy Wallace remembers him writing in one with a Care Bears cover. But he found that he had lost his commitment to fiction. He was becoming healthy, but felt adrift. In May, 1990, he wrote to Jonathan Franzen, with whom he had recently become friends, "Right now, I am a pathetic and very confused young man, a failed writer at 28 who is so jealous, so sickly searingly envious of you and [William] Vollmann and Mark Leyner and even David fuckwad Leavitt and any young man who is right now producing pages with which he can live, and even approving them off some base clause of conviction about the enterprise's meaning and end." He added that he considered suicide "a reasonable if not at this point a desirable option with respect to the whole wretched problem."

Slowly, normality and a pleasure in writing fiction returned to Wallace. Like all the residents of the house, he had a job. One day, he was supposed to be editing the house rules, but instead he played hooky, holing up in a Brighton library with "Flight of Fear," a teen adventure novel. "I found it a ripping good read," he wrote Franzen. He added, "I think back with much saliva to times in 1984, 85, 86, 87 when I'd sit down and look up and it would be hours later and there'd be this mess of filled up notebook paper and I just felt wrung out and well fucked and well blessed." He wasn't sure all those filled notebooks had been worth it, though; he now saw himself as having been driven by a "basically vapid urge to be avant-garde and post structural and linguistically calisthenic. This is why I get very spiny when I think someone's suggesting this may be my root motive and character because I'm afraid it might be."

At the halfway house, Wallace got to know people with radically different backgrounds. "Mr. Howard," he wrote his editor, "everyone here has a tattoo or a criminal record or both!" The halfway house also showed him that less intellectual people were often better at dealing with life. They found catchphrases such as "One day at a time" genuinely helpful. To his surprise, so did he. As he later told *Salon*, "The idea that something so simple and, really, so aesthetically uninteresting—which for me meant you pass over it for the interesting, complex stuff—can actually be nourishing in a way that arch, meta, ironic, pomo stuff can't, that seems to me to be important."

Wallace picked up stories at treatment sessions, including his own. Former addicts loved to talk—part of their therapy was to talk. Eventually, Wallace was released to a quarter-way house, and then to a house with one other ex-addict. Wallace taught at Emerson College for a time. "I've had to educate myself about people like Stephen Crane and Edith Wharton," he wrote Franzen in October, 1991. "Actually that's been a blast. I had no idea they were so good. I remember reading them a little in high school and mostly wondering when they would get done so I could go eat something sugary and then masturbate." He added that "the last thin patina of rebelliousness has fallen off."

By then, he had started working on "the Project"—his name for his second novel. In March, 1991, he informed Nadell that he was now writing "daily on a schedule." Roughly a year later, he promised her that he was "going to shoot for having at least 100 pages (roughly probably a sixth or seventh) of this long document in your hands by April." When the pages were ready, he wanted them to go to Gerald Howard, with "the voluminous notes of explanation and defense I'll doubtless enclose." He was still interested in the warping power of media culture. And he had a new appreciation of addiction and its lethality: it gave him something to warn against. He created a character named Hal Incandenza, who bridged two worlds Wallace knew well—Incandenza is a pothead and a talented high-school tennis player. He goes to an academy run by his family, which his older brother, Orin, also attended. Their father, James, a filmmaker, committed suicide after making a short movie called "Infinite Jest," recorded in a format called a "cartridge," which is so engrossing that anyone who watches it loses all desire. Wallace writes of one viewer, "He has rewound to the beginning several times and then configured for a recursive loop. He sits there, attached to a congealed supper, watching at 0020h, having now wet both his pants and the special recliner." The action is set in the near future: a Québécois separatist group tries to get hold of "Infinite Jest," copies of which are extremely rare, to use as a terrorist weapon.

Wallace worked quickly in the house that he shared. He filled page after page of grade-school notebooks and then typed what he'd written with two fingers on an old computer. In a letter to Nadell, he had made a promise: "I will be a fiction writer again or die trying."

In June, 1992, Wallace set out for Syracuse. The rents were cheap, and Wallace wanted to put the traumas of Boston behind him. He found a room to work in, opposite the food co-op. It was so small, he told friends, that his own body heat would keep it warm enough. He returned to the Project; the writing continued to go well, and he stayed focussed. Around town, Wallace was a familiar sight in his T-shirt, granny glasses, shorts, and bandanna. (He told *Rolling Stone* that he wore it to keep his head from exploding.) The poet Mary Karr, who taught at Syracuse and dated Wallace, recalls him filling his five-and-dime notebooks with "that fastidious little spider hand." If he was working well, he would make sure to use the same pen the next day; he'd call it his "orgasm pen." Costello, who visited him at Syracuse, recalls, "He would walk around with a notebook, sit down, cross his legs, and start writing. Desperate as his life was, he was working."

By May, 1992, he had sent two hundred pages of "Infinite Jest" to Howard, who read them with amazement. He now saw Wallace's addiction, descent, and recovery as "a ceremony of purification." Michael Pietsch, an editor at Little, Brown who had become friends with Wallace, also read the pages. "I want to do this book more than I want to breathe," he told Bonnie Nadell. Pietsch, who had a reputation for publishing innovative fiction, outbid Howard with an eighty-thousand-dollar offer, and Wallace changed publishers.

Wallace was pushing himself to get beyond the facile skepticism of "Broom." In 1993, he told *Whiskey Island*, a literary magazine, "This is a generation that has an inheritance of absolutely nothing as far as meaningful moral values, and it's our job to make them up." He detected a pervasive sadness in the country. "It manifests itself as a kind of lostness," he told *Salon*, in an interview after the book was published.

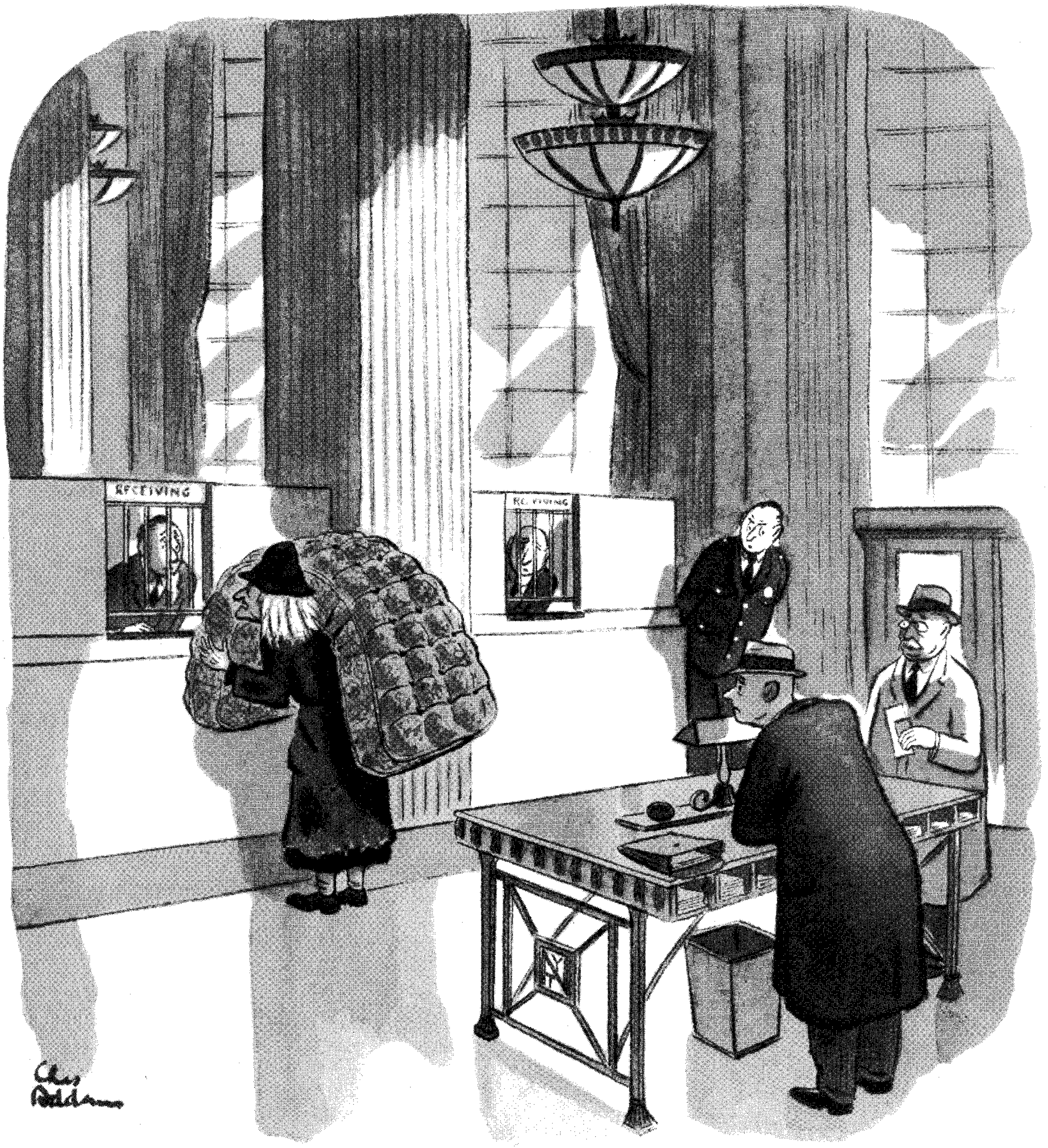
"Infinite Jest" is a story of people in pain. Near the book's opening, Hal Incandenza is rushed to an emergency room in the midst of a breakdown:

> It will start in the E.R., at the intake desk . . . or in the green-tiled room after the room with the invasive-digital machines; or, given this special M.D.-supplied ambulance, maybe on the ride itself: some blue-jawed M.D. scrubbed to an antiseptic glow with his name sewn in cursive on his white coat's breast pocket and a quality desk-set pen, wanting gurneyside Q&A, etiology and diagnosis by Socratic method, ordered and point-by-point. There are, by the O.E.D. VI's count, nineteen nonarchaic synonyms for *unresponsive*, of which nine are Latinate and four Saxonic. . . . It will be someone blue-collar and unlicensed, though, inevitably—a nurse's aide with quick-bit nails, a hospital security guy, a tired Cuban orderly who addresses me as *jou*—who will, looking down in the middle of some kind of bustled task, catch what he sees as my eye and ask So yo then man what's *your* story?

The passage held out a hope rarely signalled in his earlier work: the possibility that telling a story could lead to redemption. The idea had been central to the sobriety sessions he had attended. As he told *Salon*, "I get the feeling that a lot of us, privileged Americans, as we enter our early 30s, have to find a way to put away childish things and confront stuff about spirituality and values. Prob-

CHARLES ADDAMS, 2/5/1938

FROM OUR ARCHIVES


RECEIVING
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Chas Addams

"I want to make a deposit."

ably the A.A. model isn't the only way to do it, but it seems to me to be one of the more vigorous."

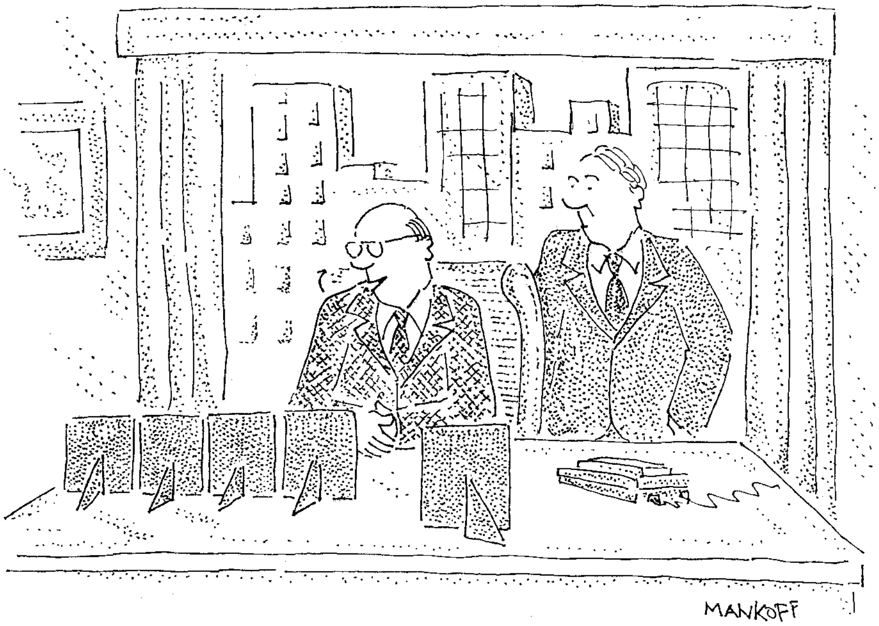
His relationship with Mary Karr was volatile. She inspired a character in the novel—a radio host named Madame Psychosis who ends up in the halfway house. Wallace got a tattoo of a heart with Mary's name on it. He signed his letters to her "Young Werther." He proposed to her. They fought. "Someone you get sober with is like someone you were in Vietnam with," Karr remembers. They split up. One day, according to Karr, he broke her coffee table. She billed him a hundred dollars. He paid her and said that the remains of the table were now his. Karr told him that she'd used them for firewood, and that all he'd bought was "the brokenness."

In the spring of 1993, Wallace submitted to Pietsch the first two-thirds of "Infinite Jest"—some four hundred thousand words. Pietsch, who had edited Rick Moody and Mark Leyner, had no trouble understanding Wallace's aesthetic. He wrote Wallace, "It's a novel made up out of shards, almost as if the story were something broken that someone is picking up the pieces of." He warned Wallace that, at this rate, the finished book would likely "top 1200 pages."

That same spring, Wallace accepted a teaching job at Illinois State University, in Normal, which had started a center for contemporary literature. In Illinois, with much of "Infinite Jest" written, he began to settle down. He bought a house, the first he'd owned, on the outskirts of Bloomington, a town that adjoined Normal. He was happy to be back in the Midwest. He got his first dog, Jeeves, at the pound, and began to work at home. He chose a room to write in and painted it black, then filled it with dozens of vintage lamps. He preferred the company of townspeople to academics, and he made a point of being available to his students, especially those in the midst of personal crises. He told most people that he did not use e-mail, but he gave his students an address. Sections of "Infinite Jest" began to appear in magazines, but he downplayed his growing fame as a writer. Doug Hesse, a colleague, made the mistake of praising an essay of Wallace's. "He did this gesture of wiping the butt with one hand and pointing to his mouth with the other," Hesse remembers. "I learned really really quickly not to go beyond the equivalent of 'How's the weather?' "

In Bloomington, Wallace struggled with the size of his book. He hit upon the idea of endnotes to shorten it. In April, 1994, he presented the idea to Pietsch, adding, "I've become intensely attached to this strategy and will fight w/all 20 claws to preserve it." He explained that endnotes "allow . . . me to make the primary-text an easier read while at once 1) allowing a discursive, authorial intrusive style w/o Finneganizing the story, 2) mimic the information-flood and data-triage I expect'd be an even bigger part of US life 15 years hence. 3) have a lot more technical/medical verisimilitude 4) allow/make the reader go literally physically 'back and forth' in a way that perhaps cutely mimics some of the story's thematic concerns . . . 5) feel emotionally like I'm satisfying your request for compression of text without sacrificing enormous amounts of stuff." He also said, "I pray this is nothing like hypertext, but it seems to be interesting and the best way to get the exfoliating curve-line plot I wanted." Pietsch countered with an offer of footnotes, which readers would find less cumbersome, but eventually agreed.

Though "Infinite Jest" had begun as a book with Hal Incandenza at its center, as it grew Wallace moved his focus more to the figure of Don Gately—a former Demerol addict and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, who is now a supervisor at a halfway house down the hill from the tennis academy where Hal plays. Gately, who as a child was nicknamed B.I.M. (for Big Indestructible Moron), is a tender thug. Late in the book, Québécois separatists shoot him in the shoulder while he is trying to protect his charges, and many of the novel's final hundred pages depict Gately's thoughts as he lies immobilized in his hospital bed, going over his life in his mind. Because he refuses to take narcotic painkillers, Gately is in agony, but he learns a way to get inside his suffering. "He could do the dextral pain," he thinks. "No single instant of it was unendurable. . . . He hadn't quite gotten this before now, how it wasn't just the matter of riding out the cravings for a Substance: everything unendurable was in the head, was the head not Abiding in the Present but hopping the wall and doing a recon and then returning with unendurable news." Gately is the first character whose distress seems to touch Wallace. He wrote Gately's reverie quickly; he even sent Jeeves away so that he could work without interruptions. (Talking to Costello, he said that his work was going so well that he "couldn't feel my ass in the chair.") "Infinite Jest" ends with Gately, in a haze, imagining a peaceful end, possibly his death: "And when he came back to, he was flat on his back on the beach in the freezing sand, and it was raining out of a low sky, and the tide was way out."



"Yes, we're very fortunate to be blessed with one of each."

Wallace sent the remaining six hundred pages of the manuscript to Pietsch in the summer of 1994. Pietsch had not expected Gately to assume such a dominant role. "The ending of the novel, the horror of Gately's hitting bottom, is gorgeous and very very powerfully sad," he wrote Wallace in December. He expressed concern, however, over the novel's many dangling threads. Earlier, he had cautioned Wallace that the reader, after so many pages, would feel entitled to "find out who or how or why."

Wallace was more certain of his literary approach than he had been when he published "Broom." He knew what he wanted to resolve and what not. He wrote to Pietsch, "We know exactly what's happening to Gately by end, about 50% of what's happened to Hal, and little but hints about Orin. I can give you 5000 words of theoretico-structural argument for this, but let's spare one another, shall we?"

Pietsch suggested extensive cuts, many of which Wallace accepted. Eventually, he learned to erase passages that he liked from his hard drive, in order to keep himself from putting them back in. In all, he delivered seventeen hundred pages, of which Pietsch cut several hundred. The bound galleys went out with a list of corrections that hadn't made the printer's deadline.

"Infinite Jest," published in February, 1996, quickly became a totem for young people. The postmodernist heyday was long past; minimalism was in decline. There was a wide opening for Wallace's opaque sincerity. His "impulse to second-guess every thought and proposition became something like a generational style," as Gerald Howard says. One day, Howard was walking down West Broadway, in Manhattan, and came across a long line of people waiting to hear Wallace read at Rizzoli. "There was this adoration," he remembers. "He had reached people in this highly personal way."

Wallace did not like being the object of so much attention. He wrote to Don DeLillo, with whom he had begun a correspondence, that he had "tried my best to tell the truth and to be kind to reporters who hadn't read the book and wanted only to discuss the 'hype' around the book and seemed willfully to ignore the fact that articles about the hype were themselves the hype (for about a week there it seemed to me that the book became the Most Photographed Barn, everyone tremendously excited over the tremendous excitement surrounding a book that takes over a month of hard labor to read)."

As soon as he could, he finished his book tour and retreated to Bloomington, to his house and to Jeeves and the Drone—a stray who had joined him and Jeeves one day when they were out running. In the wake of "Infinite Jest," he felt anxiety about his writing. Earlier, Wallace had asked DeLillo whether it was normal. DeLillo reassured him, invoking Henry James's words: "Doubt is our passion." He added, "Some writers may have to do 2, 3 books, say in midcareer, before they remember that writing can be fun."

Wallace worked successfully on some stories, later published in the 2004 collection "Oblivion." In "The Soul Is Not a Smithy," a man looking back on his childhood wonders how his father could have endured the boredom of his work as an actuary. "The truth is I have no idea what he thought about, what his internal life might have been like," the son acknowledges. Wallace also began to develop a taste for journalism. He could transmit, in a more straightforward way, his point that America was at once over-entertained and sad. He took a trip on a cruise ship out of Florida to sample the packaged hedonism, and chronicled the casual cruelty of the Maine lobster fair. "Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?" he asked.

Yet he felt unfulfilled. When Charlie Rose interviewed him, in 1997, Wallace said, "A lot of my problem right now is I don't really have a brass ring, and I'm kind of open to suggestions about what one chases." He wrote to DeLillo that he thought he knew what was missing to get his fiction moving forward: "I believe I want adult sanity, which seems to me the only unalloyed form of heroism available today."

"The Pale King," the name Wallace gave to the novel that, had he finished it, would have been his third, was one-third complete, by an estimate that he made to Nadell in 2007. The novel continues Wallace's preoccupation with mindfulness. It is about being in the moment and paying attention to the things that matter, and centers on a group of several dozen I.R.S. agents working in the Midwest. Their job is tedious, but dullness, "The Pale King" suggests, ultimately sets them free. A typed note that Wallace left in his papers laid out the novel's idea: "Bliss—a second-by-second joy and gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious—lies on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom. Pay close attention to the most tedious thing you can find (Tax Returns, Televised Golf) and, in waves, a boredom like you've never known will wash over you and just about kill you. Ride these out, and it's like stepping from black and white into color. Like water after days in the desert. Instant bliss in every atom." On another draft sheet, Wallace typed a possible epigraph for the book from "Borges and I," a prose poem by Frank Bidart: "We fill pre-existing forms and when we fill them we change them and are changed."

The problem was how to dramatize the idea. As Michael Pietsch points out, in choosing the I.R.S. as a subject Wallace had "posed himself the task that is almost the opposite of how fiction works," which is "leaving out the things that are not of much interest." Wallace's solution was to overwhelm his seemingly inert subject with the full movement of his thought. His characters might be low-level bureaucrats, but the robust sincerity of his writing—his willingness to die for the reader—would keep you from condescending to them.

In one chapter, Wallace narrates the spiritual awakening of a college student named Chris Fogle:

> I was by myself, wearing nylon warm-up pants and a black Pink Floyd tee shirt, trying to spin a soccer ball on my finger and watching the CBS soap opera "As The World Turns" on the room's little black-and-white Zenith. . . . There was certainly always reading and studying for finals I could do, but I was being a wastoid. . . . Anyhow, I was sitting there trying to spin the ball on my finger and watching the soap opera . . . and at the end of every commercial break, the show's trademark shot of planet earth as seen from space, turning, would appear, and the CBS daytime network announcer's voice would say, "*You're watching 'As the World Turns,'* " which he seemed, on this particular day, to say more and more pointedly each time—"*You're watching 'As the World Turns'* " until the tone began to seem almost incredulous—"*You're watching 'As the World Turns'* "—until I was suddenly struck by the bare reality of the statement. . . . It was as if the CBS announcer were speaking directly to

> me, shaking my shoulder or leg as though trying to arouse someone from sleep—"*You're watching 'As the World Turns.'* " . . . I didn't stand for anything. If I wanted to matter—even just to myself—I would have to be less free, by deciding to choose in some kind of definite way.

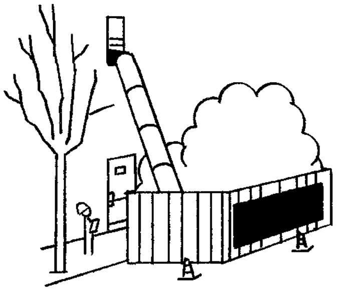
Fogle decides to join the I.R.S., and soon heads off for training in Peoria. He finds that the sustained attentiveness demanded by tax work is not easy to muster. One of Fogle's colleagues, Lane Dean, Jr., finds it especially difficult to push away the outside world. As he processes forms, Dean tries to visualize a sunny beach, as the agency taught him to do during orientation. But he cannot maintain the image—it turns in his mind to a gray expanse covered with "dead kelp like the hair of the drowned." Overcome with boredom, he entertains suicide as a possibility. "He had the sensation of a great type of hole or emptiness falling through him and continuing to fall and never hitting the floor," Wallace writes.

Other agents are adepts. An agent named Mitchell Drinion is so centered and calm that he levitates as he works. "Drinion is *Happy*," Wallace wrote in one of the notebooks he kept while writing "The Pale King." Another agent can recite a sequence of numbers that takes him into a state of exalted concentration. There is also an anxious young agent who sweated uncontrollably in high school, racing to the bathroom where "the toilet paper disintegrate[s] into little greebles and blobs all over his forehead." He is afraid of thinking about being afraid, lest he suddenly become afraid and break out in a sweat—the victim of "an endless funhouse hall of mirrors of fear." In the quiet study of tax forms he seeks composure.

"The Pale King" does not abandon postmodernism entirely: the novel is structured as a mock memoir. In a chapter called "Author's Foreword," Wallace informs the reader that he was once an employee at the I.R.S. Upon entering the bureaucracy, he reveals, agents are given new Social Security numbers; taking a job there is like being "born again." (The conceit is pure fiction.) In the mid-eighties, Wallace announces, he became "947-04-2012." After being caught selling term papers and suspended from his preppy college, he cast around for something to do, and applied to work at the I.R.S. The agency hired him as a "wiggler"—the first people to go over returns arriving at the agency. "I arrived for intake processing at Lake James, IL's I.R.S. POST 047, sometime in mid-May of 1985," Wallace writes. (A digression follows—a long footnote on the history of Lake James, followed by commentary about the confusion of having an I.R.S. office whose mailing address and building address are in separate towns.) Upon arriving at the intake center, Wallace says, he was given special treatment after being mistaken for another David Wallace—a high-powered accountant transferring to the facility from Rome, New York. For much of the chapter, everyone at the I.R.S. thinks that David Foster Wallace is the other Wallace, giving the author a double to go with his fictional rebirth.

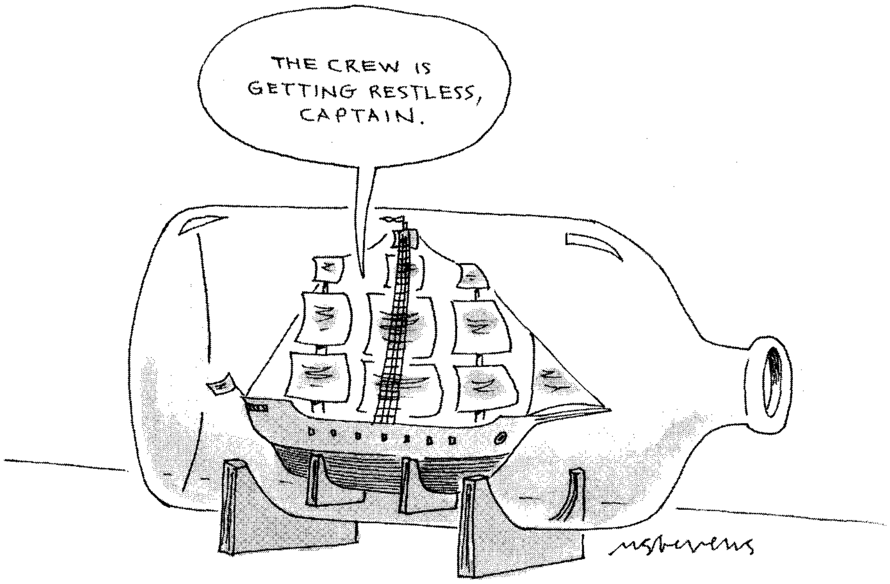
On his undeserved V.I.P. tour, Wallace gets a glimpse of a different world—a calmer one, with a "silence . . . both sensuous and incongruous." His chatty guide, Ms. Neti-Neti, accidentally opens the wrong door, showing him the room where agents do their silent work. Wallace portrays it as a kind of monastery: "I caught a glimpse of a long room filled with I.R.S. examiners in long rows and columns of strange-looking tables or desks, each of which (desks) had a raised array of trays or baskets clamped to its top, with flexible-necked desk lamps in turn clamped at angles to these fanned-out arrays, so that each of the I.R.S. examiners worked in a small tight circle of light. . . . Row after row, stretching to a kind of vanishing point near the room's rear wall." Wallace's unquiet mind is not yet ready for this paradise. Ms. Neti-Neti quickly spirits him away.

Wallace began the research for "The Pale King" shortly after the publication of "Infinite Jest." He took accounting classes. He studied I.R.S. publications. "You should have seen him with our accountant," Karen Green remembers. "It was like, 'What about the ruling of 920S?' " He enjoyed mastering the technicalities of the I.R.S. bureaucracy—its lore, mind-set, vocabulary. He assembled hundreds of pages of research on boredom, trying to understand it at an almost neurological level. He studied the word's etymology and was intrigued to find that "bore" appeared in the language in 1766, two years before "interesting" came to mean "absorbing." (He puts this revelation into the mouth of the ghost of an I.R.S. agent who comforts Lane Dean, Jr., when he despairs.)



Wallace began writing "The Pale King" around 2000. A severe critic of his own work, he rarely reported to his friends that anything he was working on was going well. But his complaints about this book struck them as particularly intense. Pietsch remembers being on a car ride with Wallace and hearing him compare writing the novel to "trying to carry a sheet of plywood in a windstorm." On another occasion, Wallace told him that he had completed "two hundred pages, of which maybe forty are usable." He had created some good characters, but the shape of the book evaded him. In 2004, he wrote to Jonathan Franzen that to get the book done he would have to write "a 5,000 page manuscript and then winnow it by 90%, the very idea of which makes something in me wither and get really interested in my cuticle, or the angle of the light outside."

Wallace's literary frustrations contrasted with his growing personal happiness. In 2002, he began dating Karen Green, a visual artist. She had asked him for permission to turn his story "The Depressed Person" into a series of illustrated panels. "The depressed person was in terrible and unceasing emotional pain," the story begins, "and the impossibility of sharing or articulating this pain was itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor in its essential horror." Through the course of "The Depressed Person" the unlovable, self-absorbed girl shuttles between friends and therapists, looking for a sympathetic ear. Only with real human contact can she improve. Wallace's story ends without a resolution. Green wanted to rewrite Wallace, so that in her last panel the depressed person would be cured. Wallace gave her permission. When he saw what she had done, he was


THE CREW IS GETTING RESTLESS, CAPTAIN.

happy. He told her that it was now a story that people would want to read.

They fell in love. Wallace put a strikeout through Mary's name on his tattoo and an asterisk under the heart; farther down he added another asterisk and Karen's name, turning his arm into a living footnote. In 2004, Wallace and Green were married in Urbana, in front of his parents. Wallace had by then accepted a new teaching appointment, at Pomona College, in Claremont, California. "I have a lottery-prize-type gig at Pomona," he bragged to *The Believer* in 2003. "I get to do more or less what I want."

Green chose a ranch-style house for them in Claremont. Wallace took his large collection of lamps and books on accounting into the garage, and started writing. He did not always stay in his workplace. Green remembers that on days when he was struggling he would go from the garage to the guest room, where there was an extra computer, and on to the family room, to write in longhand with his earplugs in—"scattering debris, intellectual and otherwise."

Green had a son, a teen-ager named Stirling, from a previous marriage, and he sometimes visited. Wallace, who never felt that he was cut out to be a father, bonded with the boy. They played chess together, with Stirling usually winning. Wallace was growing tired of teaching, but he continued to enjoy the contact with students. One student, Kelly Natoli, remembers Wallace introducing himself on the first day of a creative-writing class: "He said, 'It's going to take me, like, two weeks to learn everyone's name, but by the time I learn your name I'm going to remember your name for the rest of my life. You're going to forget who I am before I forget who you are.' "

Wallace was thrilled that his personal life was in order: he took it as evidence that he had matured. He teased Green about what a good husband he was. She remembers him saying, "I took out the garbage. Did you see that?" and "I put tea on for you when you were driving home." Green was a good partner for Wallace, too—supportive and literate, but not in awe of her husband. "We used to have this joke about how much can you irritate the reader," Green recalls. He could be needy. At night, he would beg her not to get sick or die.

At Pomona, Wallace published "Oblivion"; the last story is about a man for whom great art comes so easily he can defecate it. He also wrote essays, published his book on infinity, and went to Wimbledon to write about Roger Federer for the *Times*. To DeLillo he wrote, "I do not know why the comparative ease and pleasure of writing nonfiction always confirms my intuition that fiction is really What I'm Supposed to Do, but it does, and now I'm back here flogging away (in all senses of the word) and feeding my own wastebasket."

"The Pale King" had many ambitions. It would show people a way to insulate themselves from the toxic freneticism of American life. It had to be emotionally engaged and morally sound, and to narrate boredom while obeying the physics of reading. And it had to put over the point that the kind of personality that conferred grace was exactly the kind that Wallace did not have. In 2005, Wallace wrote in his notebook, "They're rare, but they're among us. People able to achieve and sustain a certain steady state of concentration, attention, despite what they're doing." It did not escape him that his failing to write the book was rising to a meta level—that he could not write it because he could not himself ignore the noise of modern life.

Wallace made a considerable start, though. He found a style that was amusing and engaging, that captured mindfulness without solemnity. Perhaps someone else reading the novel—Wallace would show it to no one—might have been satisfied. But his own past brilliance stalked him. In his "Author's Foreword," he assures the reader, "The very last thing this book is is some kind of clever metafictional titty-pincher." He also writes, "I find these sorts of cute, self-referential paradoxes irksome, too—at least now that I'm over 30 I do." And yet there he was, writing about "David Wallace" in long, recursive sentences with footnotes.

"The Pale King" slowly came into being. In one of Wallace's notebooks, there is a sentence suggesting that he had hit on the framework of a plot: an evil group within the I.R.S. is trying to steal the secrets of an agent who is particularly gifted at maintaining a heightened state of concentration. It was a witty notion, an echo of the Québécois villains in "Infinite Jest." It is not clear that Wallace followed up on it, but if he did it did not satisfy him. "The individual parts of this book would not be all that hard to read," he wrote Bonnie Nadell, in 2007. "It's more the juxtaposition of them, the number of separate characters, etc."

At times, Wallace put "The Pale King" aside, then picked it up again. He polished the sentences over and over. A few sections achieved what he was aiming for, or came close. In 2007, he published in this magazine a small part of the novel, which dealt with Lane Dean, Jr.,'s earlier decision to have a baby with a woman he was dating. A picture of the infant on his desk comforts Dean when he considers suicide. Another scene, in which an I.R.S. agent's calm is disturbed by a colleague's menacing baby, found its way into *Harper's*, as "The Compliance Branch."

Wallace was aware that he did not have to keep working on "The Pale King." He had become a vocal critic of the Bush Administration. "I am, at present, partisan," he had told *The Believer* in 2003. "Worse than that: I feel such deep, visceral antipathy that I can't seem to think or speak or write in any kind of fair or nuanced way about the current administration. . . . My own plan for the coming fourteen months is to knock on doors and stuff envelopes. Maybe even to wear a button. To try to accrete with others into a demographically significant mass. To try extra hard to exercise patience, politeness, and imagination on those with whom I disagree. Also to floss more." Green, in an e-mail, told me that "mostly what he (we) did was rant and give $, rant and give $."

Wallace and Green discussed his quitting writing. "He talked about opening up a dog shelter," she remembers. "Who knows," he wrote to Franzen about the idea. "Life sure is short though." He considered focussing on his nonfiction. The Federer piece had brought him joy. He stopped the nonfiction for a period, to see if it made the fiction come easier—was the magazine work dissipating his ability to finish "The Pale King"? "It just made him crazy to think he had been working on it for so long," Green remembers.

Wallace tried to keep things in perspective. In July, 2005, he wrote an e-mail to Franzen: "Karen is killing herself rehabbing the house. I sit in the garage with the AC blasting and work very poorly and haltingly and with (some days) great reluctance and ambivalence and pain. I am tired of myself, it seems: tired of my thoughts, associations, syntax, various verbal habits that have gone from discovery to technique to tic. It's a dark time workwise, and yet a very light and lovely time in all other respects. So overall I feel I'm ahead and am pretty happy."

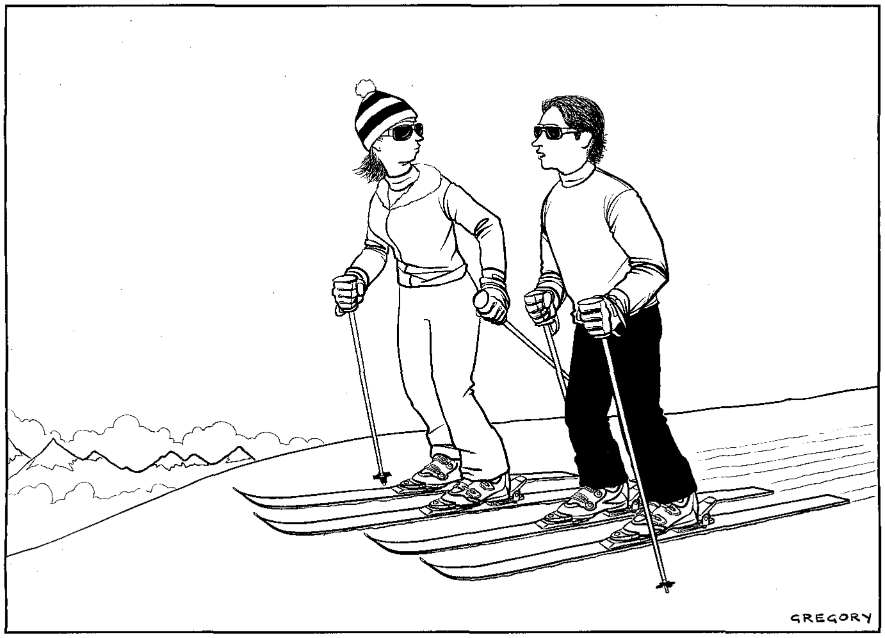
Six months later, in another e-mail to Franzen, he spoke of "many, many pages written, then either tossed or put in a sealed box." He wrote, "The whole thing is a tornado that won't hold still long enough for me to see what's useful and what isn't," adding, "I've brooded and brooded about all this till my brooder is sore. Maybe the answer is simply that to do what I want to do would take more effort than I am willing to put in. Which would be a bleak reality indeed, if that's all it is." In the same note, he says how much he admired Philip Roth, who was enjoying, as he saw it, "a Dostoevskian golden period."

In his final major interview, given to *Le Nouvel Observateur* in August, 2007, he talked about various writers he admired—St. Paul, Rousseau, Dostoyevsky among them—and added "what are envied and coveted here seem to me to be qualities of human beings—capacities of spirit—rather than technical abilities or special talents." He was no longer sure he was the kind of person who could write the novel he wanted to write.

Around this time, Wallace wrote Nadell, telling her that he needed "to put some kind of duresse/pressure on myself so that I quit futzing around changing my mind about the book twice a week and just actually do it." He prepared a stack of about a hundred and fifty pages of "Pale King" to send to Pietsch. There were plenty of equally finished pages—among them the story of the levitating Drinion—which, for whatever reason, he did not include. "I could take a couple of years unpaid leave from Pomona and try and finish it," he wrote to Nadell. When she encouraged him, he responded more hesitatingly: "Let me noodle hard about it. It may not be until the end of summer that I'd even have a packet together." In June, he e-mailed Franzen: "I go back and forth between (a) working to assemble a big enough sample to take an advance, and (b) recoiling in despair, thinking . . . I'd pitch everything and start over."

Meanwhile, Wallace was becoming more convinced that Nardil might be getting in the way of "The Pale King." The distorting effect of being on antidepressants was something that had long bothered him. In "The Planet Trillaphon," the story he wrote while at Amherst, his character says, "I've been on antidepressants for, what, about a year now, and I suppose I feel as if I'm pretty qualified to tell what they're like. They're fine, really, but they're fine in the same way that, say, living on another planet that was warm and comfortable and had food and fresh water would be fine: it would be fine, but it wouldn't be good old Earth."

There were other important reasons to get off Nardil. The drug could create problems with his blood pressure, an increasing worry as he moved into middle age. In the spring of 2007, when he went to the Persian restaurant and left with severe stomach pains, the doctor who told him that Nardil might have interacted badly with his meal added that there were better options now—Nardil was "a dirty drug."



"Sure, I play hard, but I also inherit hard."

Wallace saw an opportunity. He told Green that he wanted to try a different antidepressant. "You know what? I'm up for it," she remembers answering. She knew that the decision was hard for him. "The person who would go off the medications that were possibly keeping him alive was not the person he liked," she says. "He didn't want to care about the writing as much as he did."

Soon after, he stopped the drug. At first, he felt that the process was going well. "I feel a bit 'peculiar,' which is the only way to describe it," he e-mailed Franzen in August. "All this is to be expected (22 years and all), and I am not unduly alarmed." A month later, he was more concerned: "I've been blowing stuff off and then having it slip my mind. This is the harshest phase of the 'wash-out process' so far; it's a bit like I imagine a course of chemo would be." He remained "fairly confident it will pass in time." Three months later, he wrote to Nadell, "Upside: I've lost 30 pounds. Downside: I haven't even thought about work since like September. I'm figuring I get 90 more days before I even remotely expect anything of myself—the shrink/expert says that's a fairly sane attitude."

Ever since he ended his addiction, drugs had been anathema to Wallace; Don Gately's refusal to take narcotic painkillers after he is shot makes him the hero of "Infinite Jest." At one point after getting off Nardil, Wallace decided he should try to do without any antidepressant. Given his psychiatric history, Green was worried. Her husband, she remembers thinking, would need "a Jungian miracle." In the fall, Wallace had to be hospitalized for severe depression.

When he came out, doctors prescribed other antidepressants. But, according to Green, he was now too panicked to give them time to work. He took over the job of keeping himself sane, second-guessing doctors and their prescriptions. If he tried a new drug, he would read that a possible side effect was anxiety, and that alone would make him too anxious to stay on the drug. He was in a hall of mirrors of fear.

He continued to write in a notebook, but he rarely returned to his massive manuscript. "The Pale King" had once referred to the I.R.S., or possibly to the state of contentment and focus the book advocated; but now, as he wrote in a notebook, it was a synonym for the depression that tormented him.

Not every day was bad. He taught. He e-mailed friends. He and Green tried to maintain their lives. Always self-critical, Wallace would rate good days as "B-plus" or "cautiously optimistic." They joked about the unthinkable. Green warned him that if he killed himself she'd be "the Yoko Ono of the literary world, the woman with all the hair who domesticated you and look what happened." They made a pact that he would not make her guess how he was doing.

During the spring of 2008, a new combination of antidepressants seemed to stabilize him. When *GQ* asked him to write an essay on Obama and rhetoric, he felt almost well enough to do it. The magazine reserved a hotel room for him in Denver. But he cancelled. That June, the annual booksellers' convention was in Los Angeles, and Wallace drove there to have dinner with Pietsch, Nadell, and a few others. Pietsch was amazed at how thin Wallace was. Nadell, at Wallace's request, explained to magazine editors that he had a stomach malady. "It had to be severe enough to explain why he couldn't travel," she remembers.

About ten days after the dinner, Wallace checked in to a motel about ten miles from his home and took an overdose of pills. When he woke up, he called Green, who had been searching for him all night. When she met him at the hospital, he told her that he was glad to be alive. He was sorry that he'd made her look for him. He switched doctors and agreed to try electroconvulsive therapy again. He was terrified at the prospect—in Urbana, it had temporarily taken away his short-term memory—but he underwent twelve sessions. They did not help.

Caring for Wallace was exhausting. For one nine-day period, Green never left their house. In August, her son suffered an athletic injury, and she wanted to be with him. Wallace's parents came to look after David. "It's like they're throwing darts at a dartboard," he complained to them about his doctors. They went with him to an appointment with his psychiatrist; when the doctor suggested a new drug combination, Wallace rolled his eyes. Eventually, Wallace asked to go back on Nardil. But Nardil can take weeks to stabilize a patient, and Green says that he was too agitated to give it time to work. Still, in early September, Nadell spoke with him and thought that he sounded a bit better.

Green believes that she knows when Wallace decided to try again to kill himself. She says of September 6th, "That Saturday was a really good day. Monday and Tuesday were not so good. He started lying to me that Wednesday." He waited two days for an opportunity. In the early evening on Friday, September 12th, Green went to prepare for an opening at her gallery, Beautiful Crap, in the center of Claremont, about ten minutes from their home. She felt comforted by the fact that he'd seen the chiropractor on Monday. "You don't go to the chiropractor if you're going to commit suicide," she says.

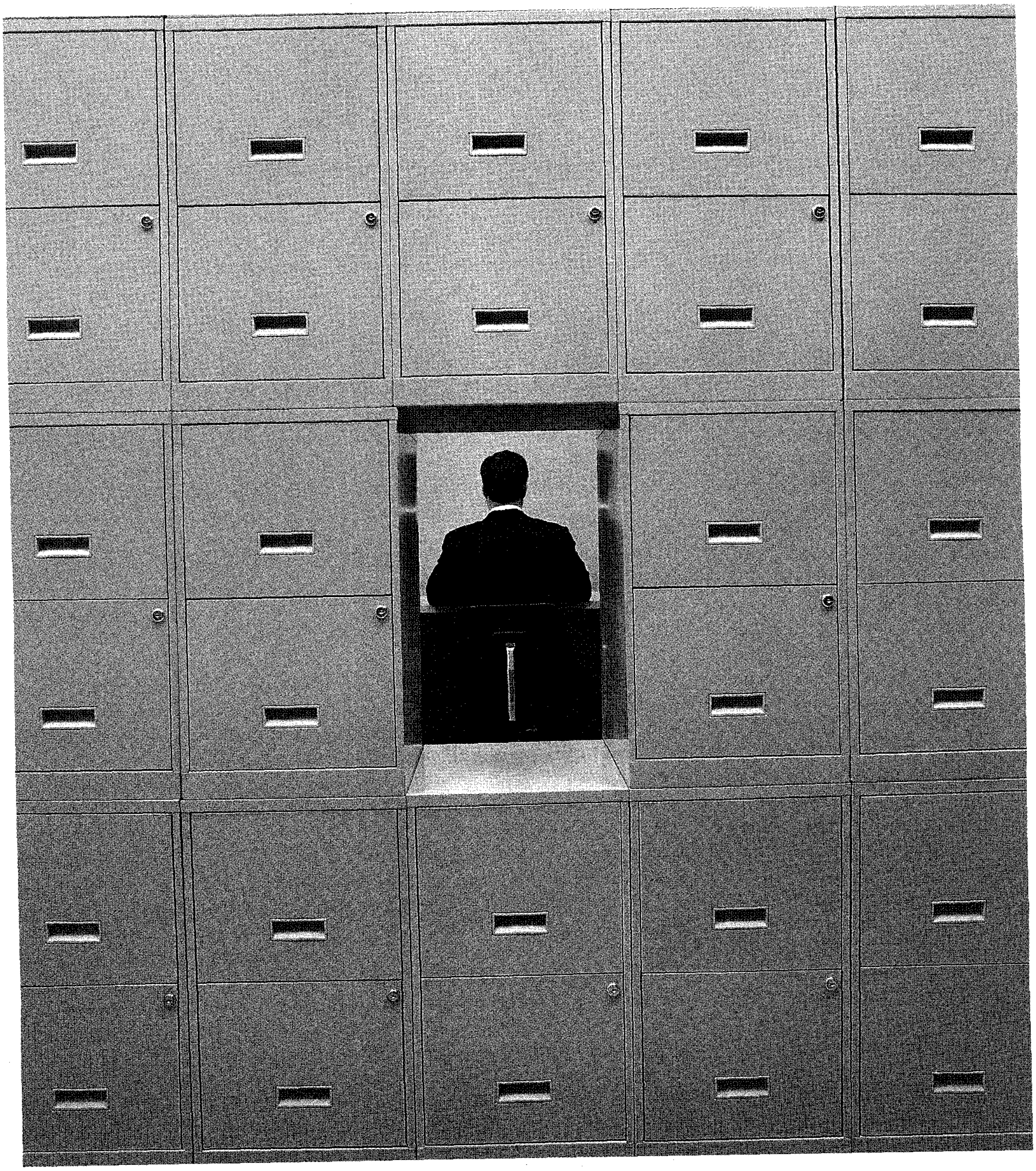
After she left, Wallace went into the garage and turned on the lights. He wrote her a two-page note. Then he crossed through the house to the patio, where he climbed onto a chair and hanged himself. When one character dies in "Infinite Jest," he is "catapulted home over . . . glass palisades at desperate speeds, soaring north, sounding a bell-clear and nearly maternal alarmed call-to-arms in all the world's well-known tongues."

Green returned home at nine-thirty, and found her husband. In the garage, bathed in light from his many lamps, sat a pile of nearly two hundred pages. He had made some changes in the months since he considered sending them to Little, Brown. The story of "David Wallace" was now first. In his final hours, he had tidied up the manuscript so that his wife could find it. Below it, around it, inside his two computers, on old floppy disks in his drawers were hundreds of other pages—drafts, character sketches, notes to himself, fragments that had evaded his attempt to integrate them into the novel. This was his effort to show the world what it was to be "a fucking human being." He had not completed it to his satisfaction. This was not an ending anyone would have wanted for him, but it was the ending he chose. ♦

FICTION

WIGGLE ROOM

BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE



Lane Dean, Jr., with his green rubber pinkie finger, sat at his Tingle table in his chalk's row in the rotes group's wiggle room and did two more returns, then another one, then flexed his buttocks and held to a count of ten and imagined a warm pretty beach with mellow surf, as instructed in orientation the previous month. Then he did two more returns, checked the clock real quick, then two more, then bore down and did three in a row, then flexed and visualized and bore way down and did four without looking up once, except to put the completed files and memos in the two Out trays side by side up in the top tier of trays, where the cart boys could get them when they came by. After just an hour the beach was a winter beach, cold and gray and the dead kelp like the hair of the drowned, and it stayed that way despite all attempts. Then three more, including one 1040A, where the deductions for A.G.I. were added wrong and the Martinsburg printout hadn't caught it and had to be amended on one of the Form 020-Cs in the lower left tray, and then a lot of the same information filled out on the regular 20, which you still had to do even if it was just a correspondence audit and the file going to Joliet instead of the District, each code for which had to be looked up on the pullout thing he had to scoot the chair awkwardly over to pull out all the way. Then another one, then a plummeting inside of him as the wall clock showed that what he'd thought was another hour had not been. Not even close. May 17, 1985. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a poor sinner. Cross-checking W-2s for the return's line 8 off the place in the Martinsburg printout where the perforation, if you wanted to separate the thing's sheets, went right through the data and you had to hold it up against the light and almost sometimes guess, which his chalk leader said was a chronic bug with Systems but the wiggler was still accountable. The joke this week was: How was an I.R.S. rote examiner like a mushroom? Both kept in the dark and fed horseshit. He didn't know how mushrooms even worked, if it was true that you scooped waste on them. Sheri's cooking wasn't what you would call at the level of adding mushrooms. Then another return. The rule was, the more you looked at the clock the slower the time went. None of the wigglers wore a watch, except he saw that some kept them in their pockets for breaks. Clocks on Tingles were not allowed, nor coffee or pop. Try as he might, he could not this last week help envisioning the inward lives of the older men to either side of him, doing this day after day. Getting up on a Monday and chewing their toast and putting their hats and coats on knowing what they were going out the door to come back to for eight hours. This was boredom beyond any boredom he'd ever felt. This made the routing desk at UPS look like a day at Six Flags. It was May 17th, early morning, or early midmorning you could maybe almost call it now. He could hear the squeak of the cart boys' carts someplace off at a distance, where the vinyl panels between his chalk's Tingles and the blond Oriental fellow's chalk one row up blocked the sight of them, the kids with the carts. One of the carts had a crazy wheel that chattered when the boy pushed it; Lane Dean always knew when that cart was coming down the rows. He did another return; again the math squared and there were no itemizations on 32 and the printout's numbers for W-2 and 1099 and Forms 2440 and 2441 appeared to square, and he filled out his codes for the middle tray's 402 and signed his name and I.D. number that some part of him still refused to quite get memorized so he had to unclip his badge and check it each time and then stapled the 402 to the return and put the file in the top tier's rightmost tray for 402s Out and refused to let himself count the number in the trays yet, and then unbidden came the thought that "boring" also meant something that drilled in and made a hole. His buttocks already ached from flexing, and the mere thought of envisioning the desolate beach unmanned him. He shut his eyes but, instead of praying for inward strength now, he found he was just looking at the strange reddish dark and the little flashes and floaters in there that got almost hypnotic when you really looked at them. Then, when he opened his eyes, the In tray's stack of files looked to be still mainly the height it had been at 7:14, when he'd logged in in the chalk leader's notebook and there weren't enough files in his Out trays for Form 20s and 402s so that he could see any over the side of the trays, and he refused once more to stand up to check how many of them there were, for he knew that would make it worse. He had the sensation of a great type of hole or emptiness falling through him and continuing to fall and never hitting the floor. Never before in his life up to now had he once thought of suicide. He was doing a return at the same time he fought with his mind, with the sin and affront of even the passing thought. The room was silent, except for the adding machines and the chattering sound of that one kid's cart that had a crazy wheel as the cart boy brought it down a certain row with more files, but also he kept hearing in his head the sound a piece of paper makes when you tear it in half over and over. His six-man chalk was a quarter of a row, separated off by the gray vinyl screens. A team is four chalks, plus the team leader and a cart boy, some of these from P.C.B., Peoria College of Business. The screens could be moved around to reconfigure the room's layout. Similar rotes groups were in the rooms to either side. Far to the left, past three other chalks' rows, was the Group Manager's office, with the A.G.M.'s little cubicle of screens next to it. The little pinkie rubbers were for traction on the forms. You were supposed to save the rubber at the end of the day. The overhead lights cast no shadow, even of your hand if you held it out like you were reaching for a tray. Darren and Dianne Lotwis, of 402 Elk Court, Edina, Minnesota, who itemized and then some, had elected to have $1 go to the Presidential Election Campaign Fund, which was box 5 on the 402, and it took several minutes to cross-check everything on Schedule A, but nothing qualified for the specs of a promising audit, even though Mr. Lotwis had the jaggedy handwriting of a crazy man. Lane Dean had filed far less 20s than protocol called for. On Friday, he'd had the least 20s of anyone in the chalk. Nobody'd said anything. All the wastebaskets were full of the curled strips of paper from the adding machines. Everyone's face was the color of wet lead in the fluorescent light. You could make a semiprivate cubicle out of the screens, like the team leader had. Then he looked up, despite all best prior intentions. In

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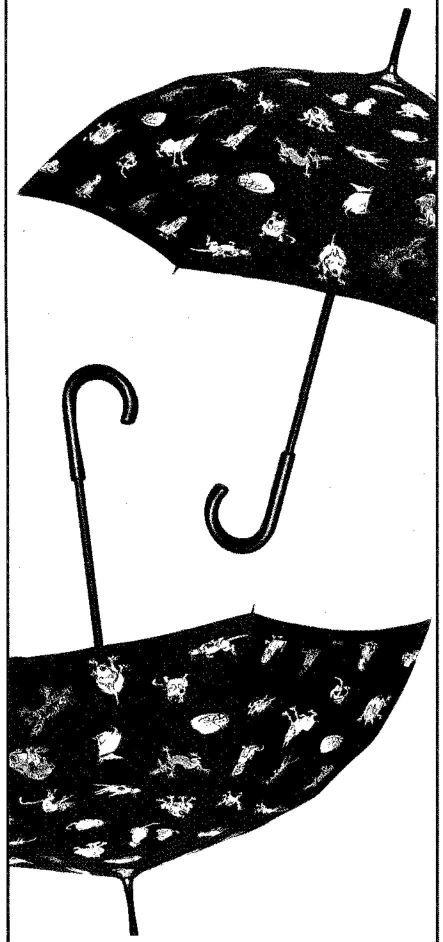

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four minutes, it would be another hour; a half hour after that was the ten-minute break. Lane Dean imagined himself running around on the break, waving his arms and shouting gibberish and holding ten cigarettes at once in his mouth, like a panpipe. Year after year, a face the same color as your desk. Lord Jesus. Coffee wasn't allowed because of spills on the files, but on the break he'd have a big cup of coffee in each hand while he pictured himself running around the outside grounds, shouting. He knew what he'd really do on the break was sit facing the wall clock in the lounge and, despite prayers and effort, count the seconds tick off until he had to come back and do this again. And again and again and again. The imagined sound made him remember different times he'd seen people rip paper in half. He thought of a circus strongman tearing a phone book; he was bald and had a handlebar mustache and wore a stripy all-body swimsuit like people wore in the distant past. Lane Dean summoned all his will and bore down and did three returns in a row, and began imagining different high places to jump off of. He felt in a position to say he knew now that hell had nothing to do with fires or frozen troops. Lock a fellow in a windowless room to perform rote tasks just tricky enough to make him have to think, but still rote, tasks involving numbers that connect to nothing he'll ever see or care about, a stack of tasks that never goes down, and nail a clock to the wall where he can see it, and just leave the man there to his mind's own devices. Tell him to pucker his butt and think beach when he starts to get antsy—and that would be just the word they'd use, *antsy*, like his mother. Let him find out in time's fullness what a joke the word was, how it didn't come anyplace close. He'd already dusted the desk with his cuff, moved his infant son's photo in its rattly little frame where the front glass slid a bit if you shook it. He'd already tried switching the green rubber over and doing the adding machine with his left hand, pretending he'd had a stroke and was bravely soldiering on. The rubber made the pinkie's tip all damp and pale beneath it. The beach now had solid cement instead of sand and the water was gray and barely moved, just quivered a little, like Jell-O that's almost set. Unbidden came ways to kill himself with Jell-O. Lane Dean tried to control the rate of his heartbeat. He wondered if, with enough practice and concentration, you could stop your heart at will, the same way you hold your breath—like this right here. His heart rate felt dangerously slow and he became scared and tried to keep his head inclined by rolling his eyes way up and compared the rate to the clock's second hand, but the second hand seemed impossibly slow. The sound of ripping paper again and again. Some cart boys brought you files with everything you needed; some did not. The buzzer to bring a cart boy was just under the iron desk's edge, with a wire trailing down one of the desk's sides and little welded-on leg, but it didn't work. Atkins said the wiggler who'd been at the desk before him, who'd got transferred someplace, had pressed on it so much it burned the circuit. Small strange indentations in rows on the blotter's front edge were, Lane Dean had realized, the prints of teeth that somebody had bent and pressed real carefully into the blotter so that the indentations went way down and stayed there. He felt he could understand. It was hard to keep from smelling his finger; at home, he'd find himself doing it, staring into space at the table. His baby boy's face worked better than the beach; he imagined him doing all sorts of little things that he and his wife could talk about later, like curling his fist around one of their fingers or smiling when Sheri made that amazed face at him. He liked to watch her with the baby; for half a file it helped to have them in mind, because they were why, they were what made this worthwhile and the right thing and he had to remember it, but it kept slipping away down the hole that fell through him. Neither man on either side of him seemed to ever fidget or move, except to reach up and lift things onto the desk from their Tingles' trays, like machines, and they were never in the lounge at break. Atkins claimed that after a year he could examine and cross-check two files at once, but you never saw him try to do it, though he could whistle one song and hum a different one. Lane Dean watched out of the corner of his eye as a parrot-faced man by the central aisle dividing teams pulled a file out of

HAWKINS STABLE

It was years before you could climb
back up over the fallen stalls, and knock at
the Hawkinses' old door

—they were gone,
you could just look in from the road.
Field after field.
Your eyes looked two ways at once.

Under the fields,
the dense tongue of the cow—
and the horses' eyes—
and the water from the hand pump in the sink,
racing as horses race.

—*Jean Valentine*

his tray and removed the return and detached the printout and centered both documents on his blotter. With his little homemade seat cushion and gray hat on its hook screwed into the 402s tray. Lane Dean stared down without seeing his own open file and imagined being that guy with his sad little cushion and customized banker's lamp and wondered what he possibly had or did in his spare time to make up for these soul-murdering eight daily hours that weren't even a quarter through until he just couldn't stand it and did three returns in a row in a kind of frenzy where he might have missed things and so, on the next file, went very slowly and painstakingly and found a discrepancy between the 1040's Schedule E and the R.R.A. annuity tables for poor old Clive R. Terry of Alton's pissant railroad pension, but a discrepancy so small that you couldn't tell if the Martinsburg printout had even made an error or had just accepted a wide roundoff for time's sake, given the amount at stake, and he had to fill out both an 020-C and a Memo 402-C(1), kicking the return over to the Group Manager's office to decide how to classify the error. Both had to be filled out with duplicated data on both sides, and signed. The whole issue was almost unbelievably meaningless and small. He thought about the word "meaning" and tried to summon up his baby's face without looking at the photo, but all he could get was the heft of a full diaper and the plastic mobile over his crib turning in the breeze that the box fan in the doorway made. He imagined that the clock's second hand possessed awareness and knew that it was a second hand and that its job was to go around and around inside a circle of numbers forever at the same slow, unvarying machinelike rate, going no place it hadn't already been a million times before, and imagining the second hand was so awful it made his breath catch in his throat, and he looked quickly around to see if any of the examiners near him had heard it or were looking at him. When he started to see the baby's photo face melting and lengthening and growing a long cleft jaw and aging years in just seconds and finally caving in from old age and falling away from the grinning yellow skull underneath, he knew he was half asleep and dreaming but did not know his own face was in his hands until he heard a human voice and opened his eyes but couldn't see who it went with and then smelled the pinkie's rubber right under his nose. He might have drooled on the open file.

Getting a little taste, I see.

It was a big older fellow with a seamed face and picket teeth. He wasn't from any Tingle that Lane Dean had ever observed from his own. The man had on a headlamp with a tan cotton band, like some dentists wore, and a type of thick black marker in his breast pocket. He smelled of hair oil and some kind of food. He had part of his bottom on the edge of Lane's desk and was cleaning under his thumbnail with a straightened-out paper clip and speaking softly. You could see an undershirt under his shirt; he wore no tie. He kept moving his upper body around in a slight kind of shape or circle, and the movements left a little bit of a visual trail. None of the wigglers in either adjoining row were paying attention to him. Dean checked the little face in the photo to make sure he wasn't still dreaming.

They don't ever say it, though. Have you noticed? They talk around it. It's too manifest. Like talking about the air you're breathing, yes? It would be like saying, I see So-and-So *with my eye*. What would be the point?

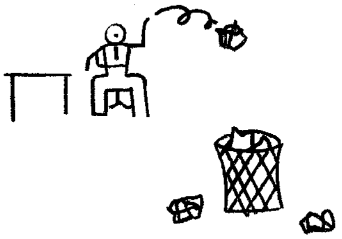
There was something wrong with one of his eyes; the pupil was bigger and stayed that way, making the eye look fixed. His headlamp wasn't on. The slow upper-body motions brought him in closer and then back and away and around again.

Yes, but now that you're getting a taste consider it, the word. You know the one. Dean had the uneasy sense that the fellow wasn't strictly speaking *to* him, which would mean that he was more like ranting. The one eye looked fixedly past him. Although hadn't he just been thinking about a word? Was that word "dilated"? Had he said the word out loud? Lane Dean looked circumspectly to either side. The Group Manager's frosted door was shut.

Word appears suddenly in 1766. No known etymology. The Earl of March uses it in a letter describing a French peer of the realm. He didn't cast a shadow, but that didn't mean anything. For no reason, Lane Dean flexed his buttocks. In fact, the first three appearances of "bore" in English conjoin it with the adjective "French"—that French bore, that boring Frenchman, yes? The French, of course, had had *malaise*, *ennui*. See Pascal's fourth *Pensée*—which Lane Dean heard as "pantsy." He was checking for errant spit on the file before him. One ham in dark-blue work pants was inches from his elbow. The man moved slightly back and forth like his waist was hinged. He appeared to be inspecting Lane Dean's upper body and face in a systematic gridlike fashion. His eyebrows were all over the place. The tan band was either soaked or stained. See La Rochefoucauld or the Marquise du Deffand's well-known letters to Horace Walpole, specifically, I believe, Letter 96. But nothing in English prior to March, Earl of. This means a good five hundred years of no word for it, you see, yes? He rotated slightly away. In no way was this a vision. Lane Dean had heard of the phantom but never seen it. The phantom of the hallucination of repetitive concentration held for too long a time, like saying a word over and over until it kind of melted and got foreign. Mr. Bondurant's high hard gray hair was just visible four Tingles down. No word for the Latin *accidia* made so much of by monks under Benedict. For the Greek ἀκηδία. Also the hermits of third-century Egypt, the so-called *daemon meridianus,* when their prayers were stultified by pointlessness and tedium and a longing for violent death. Now Lane Dean was looking openly around, as in, like, who is this fellow? The one eye was fixed at a point over past the row of vinyl screens. The tearing sound had gone, as had that one cart's squeaky wheel.

The fellow cleared his throat. Donne, of course, called it *lethargie*, and for a time it seems conjoined somewhat with melancholy, saturninia, *otiositas*, *tristitia;* that is, to be confused with sloth and torpor and lassitude and *eremia* and vexation and distemper and attributed to spleen—for example, see Winchilsea's "black jaundice," or, of course, Burton. The man was still on the same thumbnail. Quaker Green in, I believe, 1750 called it "spleen-fog." Hair oil made Lane Dean think of the barber's, of the stripy pole that seemed to spiral eternally upward but—you could see when the shop closed and it stopped—really didn't. The hair oil had a name. No one under sixty used it. Mr. Bondurant used a men's spray. The fellow appeared unconscious of his upper body's underwater X-shaped rotations. Two of the wigglers in a team near the door had long beards and black derbies and bobbed at their Tingles as they examined returns, but their bobbing was rapid and back and forth only; this was different. The examiners on either side didn't look up or pay attention; their fingers on the adders never slowed. Lane Dean couldn't tell if this was a sign of their professional concentration or something else. Some wore the rubber on the left pinkie, most on the right. Atkins was ambidextrous—he could fill out different forms with each hand. The fellow on his left hadn't blinked once all morning that Dean had been able to see. And then suddenly up it pops. *Bore.* As if from Athena's forehead. Noun and verb, participle as adjective, whole nine yards. Origin unknown, really. We do not know. Nothing on it in Johnson. Partridge's only entry is on "bored" as a subject complement and what preposition it takes, since "bored of," as opposed to "with," is a class marker, which is all that ever really concerns Partridge. Class class class. The only Partridge Lane Dean knew was the same TV Partridge everybody else knew. He had no earthly idea what this guy was talking about, but at the same time it unnerved him that he'd been thinking about "bore" as a word as well, the word, many returns ago. Philologists say it was a neologism, and just at the time of industry's rise, too, yes? Of the mass man, the automated turbine and drill bit and bore, yes? Hollowed out? Forget Friedkin, have you seen "Metropolis"? All right, this really creeped Lane out. His inability to say anything to this guy or ask him what he even wanted felt a little like a bad dream as well. The night after his first day, he'd dreamed of a stick that kept breaking over and over but never got smaller. The Frenchman pushing that uphill stone throughout eternity. Look, for instance, at L. P. Smith's "English Language," '56, I believe, yes? It was the bad eye, the frozen eye, that seemed to inspect what he leaned toward. Posits certain neologisms as "arising from their own cultural necessity"—his words, I believe. Yes, he said. When the kind of experience that you're getting a man-sized taste of becomes possible, the word invents itself. The term. Now he switched nails. It was Vitalis that'd soaked the headlamp's band, which looked more and more like a bandage. The Group Manager's door had his name on it painted on the same pebbled-glass window thing that older high schools have. Personnel's doors were the same as well. The wiggle rooms had windowless metal fire doors on struts up top, a newer model. Consider that the Oglok of Labrador have more than a hundred separate and distinct words for snow. Smith puts it that when anything assumes sufficient relevance it finds its name. The name springs up under cultural pressure. Really quite interesting when you consider it. Now, for the first time, the fellow at the Tingle to the right turned briefly to give the man a look and turned just as fast back around when the man made his hands into claws and held them out at the other wiggler like a demon or someone possessed. The whole thing happened almost too fast to be real to Lane Dean. The wiggler turned a page in the file before him. Someone else had also called it that: "soul-murdering." Which now you will, too, yes? In the nineteenth century, then, suddenly the word's everywhere; see, for example, Kierkegaard's "Strange that boredom, in itself so staid and solid, should have such power to set in motion." When he slid his big ham off the desktop, the movement made the smell stronger; it was Vitalis and Chinese food, the food in the little white bucket with the wire handle, Moo-goo something. The room's light on the frosted glass was different because the door was slightly open, though Lane Dean hadn't seen the door open. It occurred to him that he might pray.

The man made the same gridlike swaying motion standing. The one eye was on the Group Manager's door, open a crack. Note, too, that "interesting" first appears just two years after "bore." 1768. Mark this, two years *after*. Can this be so? He was halfway down the row; now the fellow with the cushion looked up and then back down right away. Invents itself, yes? Not all it invents. Then something Lane Dean heard as "bone after tea." The man was gone when he reached the row's end. The file and its Schedules A/B and printout were right where they'd been, but Lane's son's picture was face down. He let himself look up and saw that no time had passed at all, again. ♦



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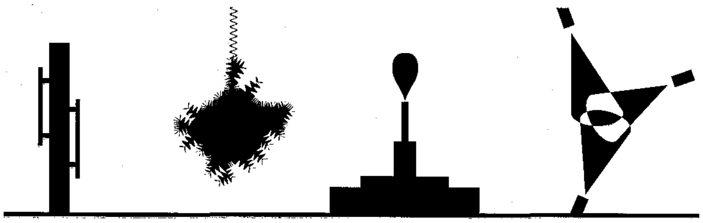


BOOKS

TRUST

Joe Torre's "The Yankee Years."

BY ROGER ANGELL

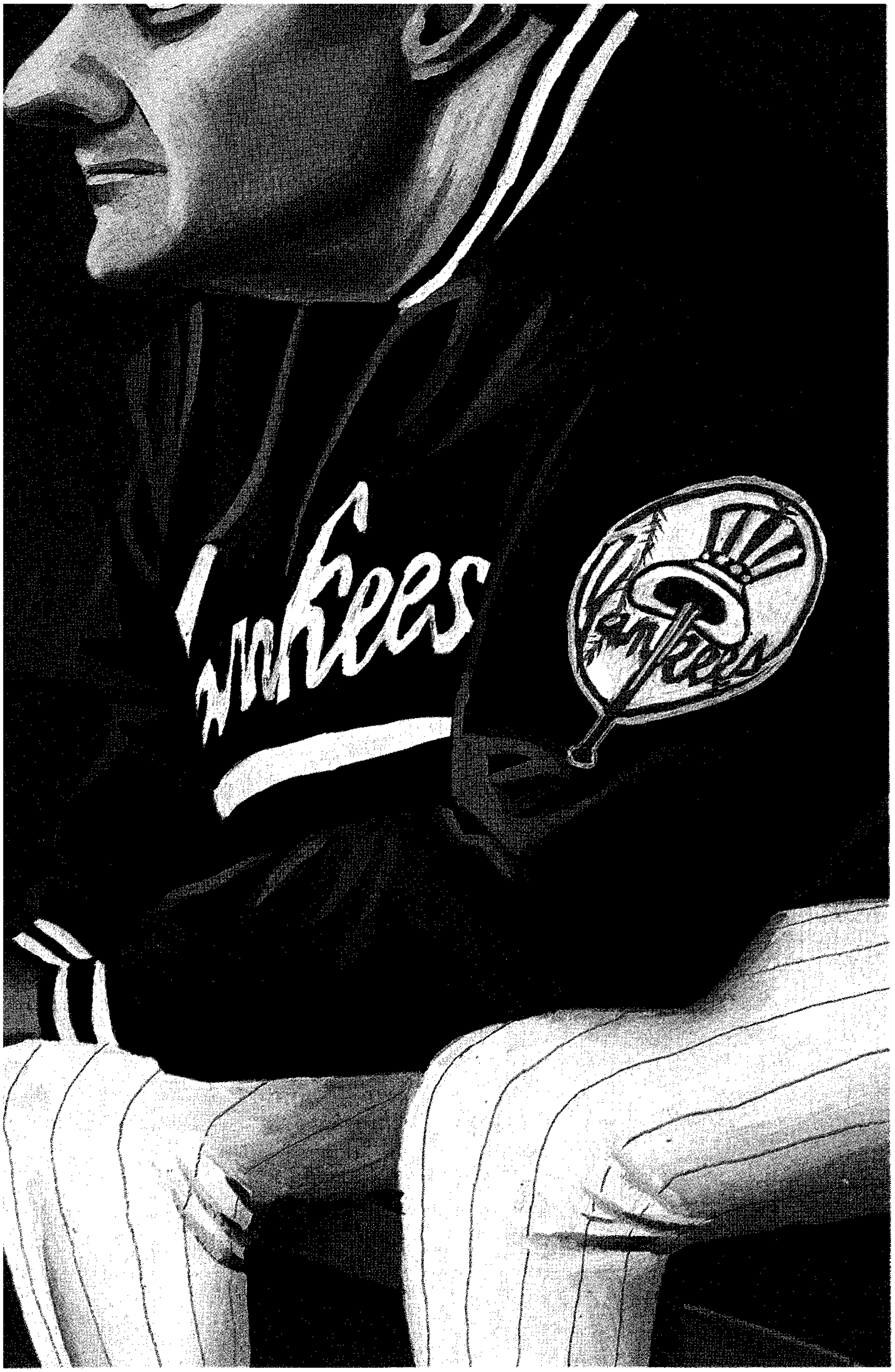
Joe Torre will be back in town on Tuesday, July 7th, reassuringly on view behind the batting cage at Citi Field as he prepares his Los Angeles Dodgers for a three-game series against the Mets. Last year, he took the Dodgers into the National League Championship Series, one step short of the World Series, but lost to the eventual 2008 Champions, the Phillies; it was the thirteenth consecutive year that a team of his had progressed into the October playoffs. The Yankees, meanwhile, finished a lacklustre third in the American League East under their new manager, Joe Girardi, and went home. For me, a longtime New York baseball fan, the shock of no Yankees in the playoffs was less than the shock of not having Joe Torre in town for the summer, and I feel the same way now, at the beginning of his second year in exile. What's lost is not the winning so much as the elegant daily and weekly, home and away managing seminar on giving your team a chance to win, or *get ready* to win—or perhaps lose, if that's the way things turn out. This tone or strategy may be only another way of enunciating Yogi Berra's "In baseball you don't know nothin'," but it's a lesson I did not fully grasp until I had watched Torre sitting immobile in the Yankee dugout through many hundreds of innings, with his lidded dark gaze raised to the level of the field; one hand occasionally reaching back for another swig of green tea; his head now and then tilting toward the words of his bench coach; and, late in the evening, his shoulders lifting as he prepared to get up and climb the steps and trudge to the mound to change a pitcher and exchange a word or two with his catcher about the situation at hand. Is this all that big-league managers do? Here's Torre: "There's a certain amount of keeping track and keeping a little grip on certain things, so somebody doesn't go off half-cocked or somebody doesn't lose their direction, but aside from that you trust these guys to play the game. I can honestly say that when the game's over that you just go home. If it wasn't good enough, it wasn't good enough. You knew they were out there giving it everything they had."

Torre's calm and presence aren't perfect throughout "The Yankee Years" (Doubleday; $26.95), a capacious fresh account of his great run in the Bronx, which he co-wrote with the *Sports Illustrated* writer Tom Verducci—there's a nice moment when he tells a Yankee president to shut the fuck up, on the phone—but trust or its poisonous absence are recurrent chords in this narrative of the Steinbrenner empire during the Yankees' four World Championships between 1996 and 2000, and their ensuing misses or near-misses from 2001 to 2007, when Torre was cut loose in humiliating fashion. Although "The Yankee Years" can be read as urban opera, with scenes taken from the Subway Series against the Mets in 2000 and the emotional resumption of play after 9/11, plus fabulous late (sometimes late, *late*) post-season duets with the Red Sox, it's also a case history of the sad physical and mental decline of Emperor George, or an M.B.A. class in radical corporate thinking and its absence in a baseball time of unimaginable financial expansion, or a further take on high-salaried egos and frail character in the steroid era of sports. The Torre-Verducci collaboration departs from the usual run of sports lit, because it's so clearly Verducci's book; he does all the writing and reporting, while Joe stands a step or two to one side and speaks up when needed. The book covers much the same ground as Buster Olney's ringing "The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty," from 2004, but gives most attention to the latter seasons and the steady input from Joe. This is straight baseball by a reporter alert enough to enlist Yankee bullpen catcher Mike Borzello and trainer Steve Donahue as significant sources.

Verducci has range and ease; he's a shortstop on the page. He gets us into the visiting-team clubhouse before the sixth game of the Yankees-Red Sox American League championship in 2004 (the Red Sox have come back from three games down), where Kevin Millar, ringleader of "the Idiots," as the hilariously loose team is known, tells manager Terry Francona that the Sox will not be taking practice that night, in order to avoid "Yankeeography crap" up on the stadium's video board. "Whatever you guys want," Francona says. Millar then tours the clubhouse, doling out slugs to his teammates from a bottle of Jack Daniel's he's come upon, and the Sox go out and nail the game.

In his chapter on steroids, Verducci deposes Rick Helling, a young pitcher and player representative with the Texas Rangers in 1998, who back then urgently told the executive board of the Players Association that steroid use was rampant in the sport and would ultimately corrupt it—to absolutely no avail. Verducci also admires the generation of young G.M.s like the Red Sox' Theo Epstein and the Indians'

Torre's instinctive fairness comes from his firsthand knowledge of the inexorable built-in swoops and lurches of baseball fortune.


Yankees
Yankees

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Comrade Lost and Found, *by Jan Wong (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; $25).* In 1972, Wong, a Montreal teen-ager giddy with Maoism, managed to enroll at Beijing University. Trying to keep up with her Red Guard classmates, she denounced a fellow-student named Yin, who had told her that she dreamed of going to America. More than three decades later, joined by her husband and sulky teen-age sons, Wong returned to search for Yin, in a country where "neighborhoods vanish and people scatter, with no one left behind to say who went where." What she ultimately finds is both better and worse than she had feared. But the ugliness of the past is not resolved, just buried by prosperity. Her former schoolmates have wealthy husbands, maids, and multiple condominiums, and every conversation turns to mortgage rates. Beijing is one big construction bubble; one wonders if, had Wong visited after the bubble burst, the quality of the mercy she encountered would have been far more strained.

Passing Strange, *by Martha A. Sandweiss (Penguin Press; $27.95).* This post-Civil War history examines the boundaries of race through the remarkable story of Clarence King, a celebrated scientist of the Gilded Age who crossed the color line in reverse. Shortly after becoming famous for surveying the Western frontier, King fell in love with a former slave named Ada Copeland. For thirteen years, until his death, in 1901, King lived a double life—as a black Pullman porter named James Todd, married to Copeland, and as a prominent society man and a mining consultant. Sandweiss is a gifted historian, but there is a dearth of reliable documentation about Copeland, and, sadly, because King destroyed all of Copeland's letters (urging her to do the same with his), his voice weighs heavier in the retelling.

Cutting for Stone, *by Abraham Verghese (Knopf; $26.95).* Blood is thicker than water, and more copious, in this expansive novel about identical twin boys born in Addis Ababa in 1954 and instantly orphaned—their mother dies, their father flees. Raised by doctors at the hospital, Shiva and Marion soon begin practicing medicine themselves, but their lives unhappily diverge. The twins have a telepathic connection, and Marion, the narrator, believes he can recall their relationship in the womb. Verghese, a doctor, has an affinity for unstinting detail and unscientific intuition. The exhaustive gore of the medical procedures is matched by a poetic perception of the outside world—arriving in New York, Marion misses the cacophony of Addis Ababa's roads, observing that in America "the cars were near silent, like a school of fish." Verghese bends history and coincidence to his narrative needs—characters cross paths when they should and find the information they seek—creating a story much like the human bodies Marion painstakingly describes: beautiful, amazing, and a bit of a mess.

The Manual of Detection, *by Jedediah Berry (Penguin Press; $25.95).* From the classic tropes of the detective procedural, this début novel weaves the kind of mannered fantasy that might result if Wes Anderson were to adapt Kafka. Charles Unwin, a meek detective-agency clerk, is set on the trail of a legendary adversary after the disappearance of a colleague. He's handed the rulebook of the title, but it gets him only so far; the vast bureaucratic agency and the nightmarish villain remain mysterious, and the nameless nocturnal city in which the story takes place presents its own series of surrealistic bewilderments. When the central conflict eventually clarifies, it's somewhat disappointing that it is a 9/11 allegory. More valuable is Berry's ability to create the feeling of inhabiting a strange and haunting dream, with its own persuasive logic and somnambulant pacing.

Mark Shapiro, who have led the post-"Moneyball" revolution in scouting and player appraisal and game tactics which has overturned the pastime.

Near the end of the book, when a distracting cloud of Lake Erie midges envelops the rookie Yankee pitcher Joba Chamberlain on the mound in Cleveland in October, 2007, causing the two wild pitches that take away the Yanks' quavering lead, Verducci slips in some entomology, then embarks on an inspired digression about the Indians' seven-year process of finding and signing (at seventeen) and patiently developing a young Dominican right-hander named Fausto Carmona. Now twenty-three, and a nineteen-game winner, Carmona stands on the mound in the ninth in this same game after eight innings' work, ignoring midges while he faces Alex Rodriguez, with two out, a Yankee base runner on second, and the game tied, and strikes him out on a power sinker. The Yankees lose, and two games later Torre's career in the Bronx is over.

Yankee fans love to look back on the good stuff and keep it on permanent replay, but there's never enough of it, because these losing nights, the killers, keep coming back and take over in our minds. In the book, it's a rush when you reach those latter-nineties or millennial late-inning Yankee explosions and Stadium-shaking endings, like the successive-night home runs against *the same pitcher*, Diamondback closer Byung-Hyun Kim, in the fourth and fifth games of the World Series of 2001. Two years along, Aaron Boone eliminates the Red Sox once again in the Championship Series, with his eleventh-inning lead-off homer into the lower left-field stands. Hold it right there—only you can't. The two biggest games in the book by far are Yankee defeats: the D-backs' seventh-game World Series effort in 2001, when Arizona rallies with a pair of ninth-inning runs against the untouchable Mariano Rivera to win their first and only championship; and the Red Sox' tying rally (again against Mo) in the ninth inning of that 2004 A.L.C.S. fourth game—they've trailed in this series, remember, three games to none, and face elimination here—and then the twelfth-inning, two-run home run by David

Ortiz that wins the game and begins the tectonic shift away from the Bronx and toward Boston.

The Steinbrenner obsession to win infects the Torre story like arsenic in a tenement flat. In June, 1996, a bare three months into his first season at the Yankee helm—a season in which the Yanks would win their first World Championship in eighteen years—he was summoned into Steinbrenner's office and told "it's your ass that's on the line" if the team, already in first place in its division, didn't win an upcoming series against the Indians. Less than a week into the 1998 season, the same threat was being levelled against a Yankee team that would go on to win more games than any team in baseball history. During spring training in 2007, when general manager Brian Cashman wanted to discuss a renewal of Torre's contract with the Boss, he was told that it was "not a good time for this," because the Yanks had just lost two exhibition games in a row. That fall, with the Yanks a game away from elimination in the Division Series against the Indians, the ill and now reclusive George took a call from a reporter for the Bergen County *Record* and said, "His job is on the line. . . . He's the highest-paid manager in baseball, so I don't think we'd take him back if we don't win this series." They did lose, and this time he didn't come back. The bullying never ended, and, in between times, Steinbrenner threatened the jobs of Torre's coaches and drove some of them, including Torre's first bench coach, Don Zimmer, and the austere long-term pitching coach, Mel Stottlemyre, into unwilling retirement. Verducci calls this policy "designated scapegoating," or making people responsible for the outcomes of others, and says that Steinbrenner loved it because it kept his employees uneasy.

None of this is new, but the tone of threat and daily rancor from George feels costumed and historic-scary now; it's like a DVD of "I, Claudius." One way to measure it all is through Torre's eyes. In eighteen years as a catcher and first baseman, on four different teams, he had never played in a post-season game; in nine of his fourteen prior seasons as a manager, with three clubs, his clubs lost more games than they won, and only one of them, the 1982 Braves, made it into the post-season, where they were swept in the first round. Making it deep into October with the Yankees never got old for him, and having been fired from three prior jobs as a manager oddly made him feel impervious to Steinbrenner's threat—he was playing with house money, as he put it. He called the Boss "Boss" or "George," not "Mr. Steinbrenner," and when his own popularity had grown to iconic proportions in New York he would reassure the Boss that he always mentioned his name and gave him credit when the writers came calling.

Torre's instinctive fairness came from his firsthand knowledge of the inexorable built-in swoops and lurches of baseball fortune. He never turned on one of his players in front of the media, and if he shows a bit more candor in the book, he remains a class act, as before. In the mortuary silence of the Yankee clubhouse after the team had lost the seventh game of the 2004 Championship playoff to the Red Sox, completing the worst collapse in post-season history, Torre made a telephone call to convey his congratulations to the Sox' manager, Terry Francona, in the other clubhouse, then asked to speak to the pitcher Tim Wakefield, who had been the victim of Aaron Boone's eleventh-inning series-ending walk-off home run in this park just a year before. "I'll never forget that phone call," Wakefield said.

Even before the midway point of "The Yankee Years," a glow of accomplishment and memory seems to accumulate around the 1996 and 1998-2000 Championship team players who made their mark and, it turned out, could not be replicated—Paul O'Neill, Chuck Knoblauch, Tino Martinez, Scott Brosius, Bernie Williams. In saga and perhaps in reality, these were selfless grinders, old-fashioned types who persisted stubbornly in every game, moved up a runner, hit the ball to the right part of the field, even for an out, until the game was somehow won, while their successors fail because they don't know or care enough about the concept. Torre says as much when O'Neill and Martinez and Brosius and Knoblauch take their leave after the 2001 season. Readers feel the yearning, too, but can't exactly glide past the pages pointing out that eight members of the 2000 team—Jose Canseco, Roger Clemens, Jason Grimsley, Glenallen Hall, David Justice, Denny Neagle, Andy Pettitte, and Mike Stanton—were later named in the Mitchell report as being steroid (or, in some cases, human growth hormone) users. Roger Clemens, a panjandrum of paradox who joined the Yanks in 1999, demanded that the team hire his personal trainer, Brian McNamee—his salary eventually came out of Clemens's eight million dollars per year—who would later testify to supplying Clemens with steroids and Pettitte with H.G.H. (Clemens and others have denied the charges.) There is no evidence that the Yankee front office knew about McNamee's sideline, but this privileged hiring agreement comes as one of the odder scraps of evidence in this era of broad denial. Torre, for his part, says he was regularly in and out of the clubhouse and the training room in these days and never saw anything amiss.

Clemens, who picked up his sixth Cy Young Award with a 20–3 season in 2001, used to slather his entire body, including his testicles, with a fiery salve just before taking the mound; aflame with concentration while pitching to the Mets' slugger Mike Piazza in the second game of the 2000 Subway Series, he fielded a shattered bat fragment, weirdly mistaking it for a ground ball, and, on discovering his misapprehension, nearly whacked Piazza with the foot-long shard, up the line, as he irritably flung the thing away. Mel Stottlemyre, seeking him out in the clubhouse later, found him weeping uncontrollably.

Already a fabled space shot, Clemens surprised teammates with moments of self-doubt after his arrival in the Bronx. Torre, who overheard him telling his mother on the telephone that he was still trying to fit in with the Yankees, said to him, " 'Fit in,' my ass. You be who you are. Be Roger Clemens." But Joe, an unabashed admirer of Clemens's verve and desire, concludes, "The thing with Roger that I found was you loved him."

Affection would never come easily for Clemens's counterpart, Alex Rodriguez, who came to the Yanks in 2004. A-Rod's consuming self-consciousness and preoccupation with image and his own statistics alienated his teammates and damaged his performance in clutch situations. Borzello eerily echoes Torre when he tells him, "You come to the Stadium and you try to get everyone to look at you. Meanwhile, they already are looking at you. You're Alex Rodriguez. I don't understand that." Less kindly teammates called him A-Fraud—a line that was seized upon and blown large by the tabloids when the first copies of "The Yankee Years" turned up, and attributed by inference to Torre. It appears to have been a clubhouse joke, part of the open baiting that Rodriguez routinely endured. What was harder for him was the daily and season-long comparisons with his infield partner, Derek Jeter, the uncomplaining and iconic Yankee gamer who epitomized a selfless, unconscious disregard for anything but the inning or the play or the at-bat immediately at hand. Torre isn't talking just about A-Rod when he says, "There's a sort of trust, a trust and commitment thing that has to allow yourself to fail. Allow yourself to be embarrassed. Allow yourself to be vulnerable. And sometimes players aren't willing to do that. . . . It's an ego thing."

Other salary-burdened celebrities toiling in the Bronx in the latter Torre days seem to have suffered from something a good distance beyond self-consciousness upon becoming Yankees. Kevin Brown, the cold-visaged ace righty acquired from the Dodgers at huge cost in 2004, walks off the field after a bad inning against the Orioles and punches a pillar in the clubhouse, breaking his non-pitching hand and sidelining himself for six weeks. Randy Johnson, the unhittable Big Unit signed to a massive contract in 2005, turns out to be a consummate worrier, obsessed with the idea that batters are picking up his pitches; he suffers a meltdown against the Angels in the Division Series, departing in the fourth inning of Game 3, with two runners aboard, no outs, and his team down by 5–0. Gary Sheffield, an established veteran outfielder with a muscled, violent swing, sulks and slumps in his first weeks with the Yanks, then approaches Torre to ask whether he'd really wanted him for the team, and not, as he's heard, the Expos' slugger Vladimir Guerrero. Torre tells him that he preferred him for the short-term contract that he had signed, because of his bat, but might have picked Guerrero over a longer span, because he was younger. "Okay," Sheffield says. "I'm committed." That night, he has four hits, including a homer, and six runs batted in, and he goes on to bat .406 with seven homers in seventeen games. Torre calls him a great team player.

Poor Joe. Given fresh infusions of top-salaried players each year, he steers his top-heavy, expectation-spooked Yankees into the playoffs each October, but victory remains elusive. The real problem, as Verducci is at pains to show, is the lack of sound pitching, top-line starters in particular. He lists twelve mid-decade Yankee pitchers, Brown among them, brought in from the outside at a cost of two hundred and fifty-five million dollars, none of whom lasted with the team for more than three years. Steinbrenner is almost gone, but Torre's support in the front office is waning, since the expected Championships are not there. After the team loses to the youthful Tigers in the 2006 Divisions, the Yanks issue the statement, over George's name, "Rest assured, we will go back to work immediately and try to right this sad failure." The sad failure had included ninety-seven wins, the most in the league.

Back in 2007 for the final year of his three-year, nineteen-million-dollar contract, Torre cannot persuade general manager Brian Cashman to bring aboard the fading Bernie Williams for a last go-round as a pinch-hitter and replacement outfielder; the two players Cashman hires instead are no help, it turns out. That year, Torre rallied the Yankees after an ugly 21–29 start, and Verducci calls the team's subsequent comeback, built on a torrent of offense—the most runs by any Yankee team in seventy years—his greatest coup as a manager. But the hovering word in the clubhouse has not changed: Joe won't be back. The Yanks make the playoffs as a wild card—it's the twelfth straight time for Torre—but those midges are just ahead. When the season ends, Joe is kept waiting for ten days to learn his future, and, journeying to Tampa, is offered a one-year contract at a reduced salary, take it or leave it. Unsupported by his onetime ally Cashman, he leaves it and goes.

Floods of media will turn out at Yankee Stadium on April 16th for Opening Day (against the Indians), the official début of the new $1.3 billion park, built largely at taxpayer expense, and also the unveiling of the Yankees' two brand-new starting pitchers, C. C. Sabathia and A. J. Burnett, signed for a combined two hundred and forty-three million dollars, and a new first baseman, Mark Teixeira, who comes with a hundred-and-eighty-million-dollar price tag. They will be closely watched, but probably not as much as Alex Rodriguez, whose recent admission that he used steroids while with the Rangers in the 2001 to 2003 seasons has dominated the Yankee news in spring training, as it will through much of the summer. Fans and sports columnists and op-edists and bloggers will ceaselessly debate his future as a potential Hall of Famer, when and if he surpasses the lifetime seven hundred and sixty-two homers struck by the tainted Barry Bonds, who is about to go on federal trial in California for perjury. Also on trial, so to speak, will be the new Stadium's attendance figures in this era of economic anxiety, and renewals on those new corporate luxury boxes (grand luxe, perhaps, at a half million dollars and up per season). When the races begin, the Yanks will have to win in the unforgiving new baseball arena created by the luxury-tax impost on top team payrolls, which has produced fourteen different names in the World Series in the past nine years, and eight different winners, and will make it hard on dynasties, however famous, in the years ahead.

Joe Torre won't be there, and, come to think of it, he's better off where he is, away in the wrong time zone. He's a cinch for the Hall of Fame—as a manager, not a player—whenever he's ready to retire, and he's already in the Grownups Hall of Fame, which has a few more members than the one in Cooperstown but tougher admission standards. ♦

BOOKS

BASICALLY DECENT

A big biography of John Cheever.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

On the one hand, Blake Bailey's biography "Cheever: A Life" (Knopf; $35) is a triumph of thorough research and unblinkered appraisal—a seven-hundred-and-seventy-page labor of, if not love, faithful adherence. John Cheever, the author of five novels and of many—a hundred and twenty-one—of the most brilliant and memorable short stories this magazine has ever printed, died in 1982, at the age of seventy, and in the years since an unusually full and frank wealth of biographical material has accumulated: a memoiristic biography, "Home Before Dark" (1984), by his daughter, Susan; a collection of letters, edited and annotated by his son Benjamin (1988); a four-hundred-page biography by Scott Donaldson (1988); and, an embarrassment of riches and a *richesse* of embarrassment, the forty-three hundred pages, mostly typed single-space, of Cheever's private journals, stored at Harvard's Houghton Library and mined, by Robert Gottlieb, for six excerpts published in *The New Yorker* between August of 1990 and August of 1991. Bailey estimates himself to be one of possibly ten persons to have read through the journals, which he calls "a monument of tragicomic solipsism." His investigations have been tireless: from the murky details of Cheever's indubitably Yankee ancestry and his career at Thayer Academy right through to the confidential lab reports on his terminal cancer, Bailey distills facts from the impressionistic version of reality that Cheever spun around himself. Of a certain Dr. Schulman, whose divulgences to his patient may have been less than candid, Bailey informs us in a footnote, "I'd very much like to hear Schulman's side of the story, but he died several years ago in a head-on collision," and of an aspiring writer assured by Cheever that he should submit his novel to a New York publisher "and they'll publish it right away," we learn in parenthesis " 'I never got it published,' the author reported thirty years later."

On the other hand, all this biographer's zeal makes a heavy, dispiriting read, to the point that even I, a reader often enraptured by Cheever's prose and an acquaintance who generally enjoyed his lively company, wanted the narrative, pursued in methodical chapters that tick past year after year, to hurry through the menacing miasma of a life which, for all the sparkle of its creative moments, brought so little happiness to its possessor and to those around him. The biography's valedictory pages are rather stunningly anticlimactic. Though "The Wapshot Chronicle" and "Falconer" appear on

A man who never loved himself: Cheever felt his own existence as a kind of mistake, a sin. Photograph by Nancy Crampton.

best-novels-of-the-century lists, “neither novel (nor any of Cheever’s others) is read much anymore.” “Academics tend to throw up their hands: Cheever is hardly taught at all in the classroom, where reputations are perpetuated.” In Ossining, New York, where he lived for decades as the town’s most prominent citizen, a move to name a short street after him was turned down at a town meeting, and only the main reading room of the public library honors his memory. The joy of the physical world, so often extolled in his fiction, and the triumph of his rise from an impoverished young immigrant to New York City to star literary status afforded him, it seems, far from enough comfort. Max Zimmer, the chief of the male acolytes and servitors brought into Cheever’s life by his belated homosexual acknowledgment and by his gradually increasing debility, said at the time, “If there’s someone who never loved himself, it was John.” Twenty-five years later, Max, married and with a family, and having turned his literary ambitions into a livelihood as a technical writer, summed up his former mentor:

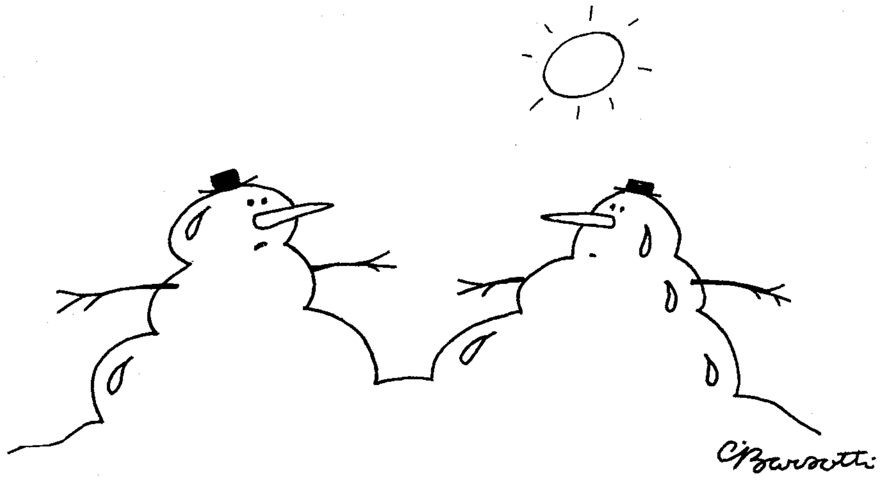
> He was extraordinarily blessed by anyone’s standards . . . but he liked to say that all he had in life was an old dog. There was his despair. And then there was his inability to comprehend the despair and self-negation he inflicted on others.

Gottlieb, who as head of Knopf published two best-sellers (“The Stories of John Cheever,” “Falconer”) that at last gave Cheever the financial ease that had always eluded him, said, of his editorial selection from the journals, “There were . . . those who thought, ‘Why are you doing this stuff? I don’t want to read one more *word* about this dopey alcoholic fag.’ ”

The basic psychoanalysis of John Cheever has been amply delivered: the unwanted late child, threatened by his father’s demand that the pregnancy be aborted; the smaller, sensitive brother of a larger, apparently successful brother; the helpless witness of his family’s descent from prosperity to a poverty of which his mother’s gift shop, in downtown Quincy, was a humiliating symbol; the homosexual yearnings suppressed in favor of mock-aristocratic respectability and an idealized domestic life; the fearfully copious drinking, bred of shyness and insecurity; and the eventual nick-of-time sobriety, with its attendant recognition of his homosexuality. Repression and expression: twin causes of complication and disharmony with others. Only dogs, usually old and feeble, didn’t let him down.

Bailey’s massive accounting did introduce, to me, some new paths of meditation upon Cheever’s paradoxical character. In the mid-nineteen-thirties, when he was selling a story now and then to various magazines and, as a protégé of Yaddo’s Elizabeth Ames, running a launch on Lake George, he had an affair with Lila Refregier, the wife of a friend. “[I] always hoped that something, the love of a beautiful woman, would cure my ailments. I thought that Lila would lead me away from my jumpy past,” he wrote in his journal in 1967. She, many years later, remembered him as “such a nice person, a basically decent person, with something in him that kept him from being completely decent.” What was this something? What were his “ailments”? None of us are completely decent, but for decades he brought to social intercourse the impatience of an incorrigible alcoholic, his inmost attention focussed on the next drink. He could be whimsically gracious to visiting strangers, but also shockingly rude; a friend from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop recalled how Cheever got drunk before a scheduled meeting with some local Christian Scientists—“This was a big event for these people, and he just treated them like dirt.” As a parent, he could be loving and companionable but was also sharply sarcastic and, in what he confided to his children, merciless. With the two oldest, Susan and Benjamin, he made no secret of his disappointments. Susan, who resembled him in her compulsions, wild streak, and intelligence, was overweight in spite of both parents’ relentless nagging; she told Bailey, “In many ways I was a tremendous disappointment to them, I’m *proud* to say, and hope I’ve continued to be, since what they wanted me to be is pretty empty.” Ben, when he came to read his father’s confessional journals, was dismayed by how little he and his siblings figured in them; he underwent, during his first marriage, a period of determined estrangement. Federico, the youngest child and the only one not a writer (he became a law professor), attempted to be his father’s caretaker in the worst days of Cheever’s alcoholic decline, and takes the most level and dispassionate view of the fabulist as essentially clueless in the real world: “He was always at sea. He didn’t understand how the world worked. He was forever being cheated by tradesmen. . . . He had no profession. He’d spent his entire career as a writer.” Federico, known in the family as Fred, insisted, “No one, absolutely no one, shared his life with him. There was no one from whom he could get honest advice.”

Certainly Cheever’s voluminous harping, in his journals, on the sexual non-responsiveness of his wife, Mary, is obtuse and less than decent in perceiving no link between Mary’s coolness and his daily drunkenness. Her attempts to get herself a separate life, through poetry and teaching and new associations, were transformed, in one of the last of his stories that could be called masterly, “The Ocean,” into the high-voiced (Mary’s distinct trait) heroine’s attempt to poison her loving husband, and, in a later story published in *Esquire*, “The Fourth Alarm,” into a wife’s enthusiastic enlistment in the cast of an all-nude, “Oh,



“Yeah, yeah, maybe it’s cyclical, but I don’t feel any better.”

Calcutta!"-like revue. Gleeful nudity was really his own thing; even while casting off his own sexual fetters, he remained prim and censorious toward others. There was, between his shadowy "proclivities" and his luminous work, an almost organic disconnect. We learn, in Bailey's biography, that Cheever, while in the Army in 1942, scored too low on the I.Q. test that would have qualified him for Officer Candidate School. He asked Mary to send him a book "on easy ways to get a high IQ," so he could raise himself "out of the moron class," but when he took the test a year later he still fell short of the requisite score of 110. He never rose above the rank of technical sergeant. His lack of formal education and of mathematics in general was surely a cause, but, still, it startles us that this impressively agile writer, with a prodigious memory that allowed him to recite a finished story verbatim, scored so averagely. Nor did he improve with age and celebrity; Smithers, the New York City sanatorium where he finally dried out, in 1975, had him upon admittance take "the abbreviated Shipley IQ test (scoring, as ever, in the high-average range)." A pre-Smithers CAT scan had disclosed "severe atrophy of the brain," which is cited as the possible cause of his intermittent spells of musical hallucination and "otherness." "I am in a bell jar or worse since I seem to respond to nothing that I see," he wrote. "I remember being as depressed in Rome. A cigarette butt in a cup, a formation of dust under a table seemed to represent the utter futility of staying alive."

John once said to me that a psychiatrist he was then seeing told him he was fascinated by criminality. He volunteered in 1971 to teach a course on the short story to inmates at Sing Sing. He befriended some of the inmates, especially a "pale, emaciated white man" and "serious loser" (son Fred's term) named Donald Lang, whom Cheever continued to associate with after his release. It was Lang who, hostilely, wondered "where a little shit like you gets the balls to come in here": even at the time of the prisoner riots at Attica, Cheever remained blithe, and later told an interviewer, "If the cons and I were lined up against a guard, I was all with the cons." The sinister power of many of his early stories entails an identification with criminality. In "Goodbye, My Brother," a story that ends with the idyllic vision of two women emerging from the sea, "naked, unshy, beautiful, and full of grace," the protagonist clubs his brother unconscious with a saltwater-soaked root. In "The Enormous Radio," the wife of a Sutton Place couple introduced as "the kind of people who seem to strike that satisfactory average of income, endeavor, and respectability that is reached by the statistical reports in college alumni bulletins" turns out, in her husband's furious accusations, to be guilty of stealing her sister's inheritance and going off to have an abortion as coolly as if she were going to Nassau. The central character of "Torch Song" feeds her morbid soul on a series of ailing, abusive lovers; the wronged secretary in "The Five-Forty-Eight" boards a commuter train with her former employer and pulls a gun on him, forcing him, at his station, to kneel down and put his face in the dirt; the hero of "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill" enters an affluent neighbor's house and steals his fat wallet. All these depths open up in conventional social scenery, sketched with a fond and lively eye for realistic detail.

Like Kafka and Kierkegaard, Cheever felt his own existence as a kind of mistake, a sin. His homosexuality, furtively explored in his boyhood but then suppressed in an apparently perfect marriage to bright, pretty Mary Winternitz (she was even the perfect size for him), seemed criminal; in his last years, he marvelled at the insouciance with which younger men, among them Allan Gurganus, accepted their own. Cheever's father, Frederick, a crusty Yankee shoe salesman, was—like his namesake, John's older brother—a vigorous participant in virile sports; he feared that with John he had "sired a fruit." As an adult, John "flung himself into icy pools and skated with a masculine swagger," and cultivated the reputation of a womanizer. In turn, he worried at Ben with suspicions that the boy had homosexual tendencies. Yet in one of the least coherent of Cheever's late stories, "The Leaves, the Lion-Fish, and the Bear" (published in *Esquire* in 1974, and in a limited edition, by Sylvester & Orphanos, in 1980), he most nakedly sought to convince himself, and the reader, that male homosexuality is innocent, of a piece with his beloved world of light and air and female beauty. Two men, Estabrook and Stark, are brought together in a motel room in a snowstorm, drink four whiskeys each, and make love: "They were both inexperienced but they reverted passionately to the sexual horseplay of adolescence." In the morning,

> The ungainliness of two grown, drunken and naked men in one another's arms was manifest but Estabrook felt that he looked wonderfully on to some revelation of how lonely and unnatural man is and how deep and well-concealed are his confusions. Estabrook knew that he had done that, which by his lights he should not have done but he felt no remorse at all—he felt instead a kind of joy at seeing this much of himself and of another. There were no concealments at that hour. These men were what they were—bewildered, naked, carnal and content—and instead of freeing himself from Stark's embrace he put both arms around the stranger and drew him closer. . . . Estabrook was astonished to find that he could convince himself he had merely discovered something about himself and his kind. When he returned home at the end of the week, his wife looked as lovely as ever—lovelier—and lovely were the landscapes he beheld.

"How lonely and unnatural man is and how deep and well-concealed are his confusions"—no wonder Cheever's fiction is slighted in academia while Fitzgerald's collegiate romanticism is assigned. Cheever's characters are adult, full of adult darkness, corruption, and confusion. They are desirous, conflicted, alone, adrift. They do not achieve the crystalline stoicism, the defiant willed courage, of Hemingway's. Cheever was not a stoic; he was for most of his adult life a regular, indeed compulsive, communicant at Episcopal morning Mass. His errant protagonists move, in their fragile suburban simulacra of paradise, from one island of momentary happiness to the imperilled next. Johnny Hake, the housebreaker of Shady Hill, confides before revealing his turn to crime, "We have a nice house with a garden and a place outside for cooking meat, and on summer nights, sitting there with the kids and looking into the front of Christina's dress as she bends over to salt the steaks, or just gazing at the lights in heaven, I am as thrilled as I am thrilled by more hardy and dangerous pursuits, and I guess this is what is meant by the pain and sweetness of life." That is about as good as it gets in Cheeverland, and such glimmers of grace and well-being are all but smothered in Blake Bailey's painstaking chronology of a tormented man's daily struggle with himself. ♦

THE ART WORLD

TAKING A TOLL

A Martin Kippenberger retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective" is the Museum of Modern Art's aptly titled retrospective of a German artist whose work is nothing if not purposely troublesome. Kippenberger died, of liver cancer, in 1997, at the age of forty-four, but by that time he had created enough paintings, sculpture, drawings, installations, photographs, posters, books, recordings, and whatnot to furnish several ordinary lifetime careers, and enough distraction, as a globe-trotting carouser, to make it marvellous that he produced anything at all, even with teams of assistants at his beck and call. I met him twice: once in Madrid, where he was seraphically drunk; and once in Los Angeles, where he was grouchily sober. Handsome when young, he became a dissolute wreck long before he fell ill—a decline that he tracked in defiantly, almost cheerfully abject self-portraits. He was extraordinarily intelligent as well as gifted, especially in drawing. But nothing he made has the inevitable feel of satisfying art. The hundreds of pictures and objects (counting discrete components of suites and ensembles) at MOMA seem undermotivated or supererogatory, leaning on tortured concepts, obscure in-jokes, and random impulses. The best pieces comment on his dishevelled life: lampposts as crooked as they might appear to drunks; endless cabin-feverish drawings on hotel stationery; numerous statues of himself enacting the title "Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself."

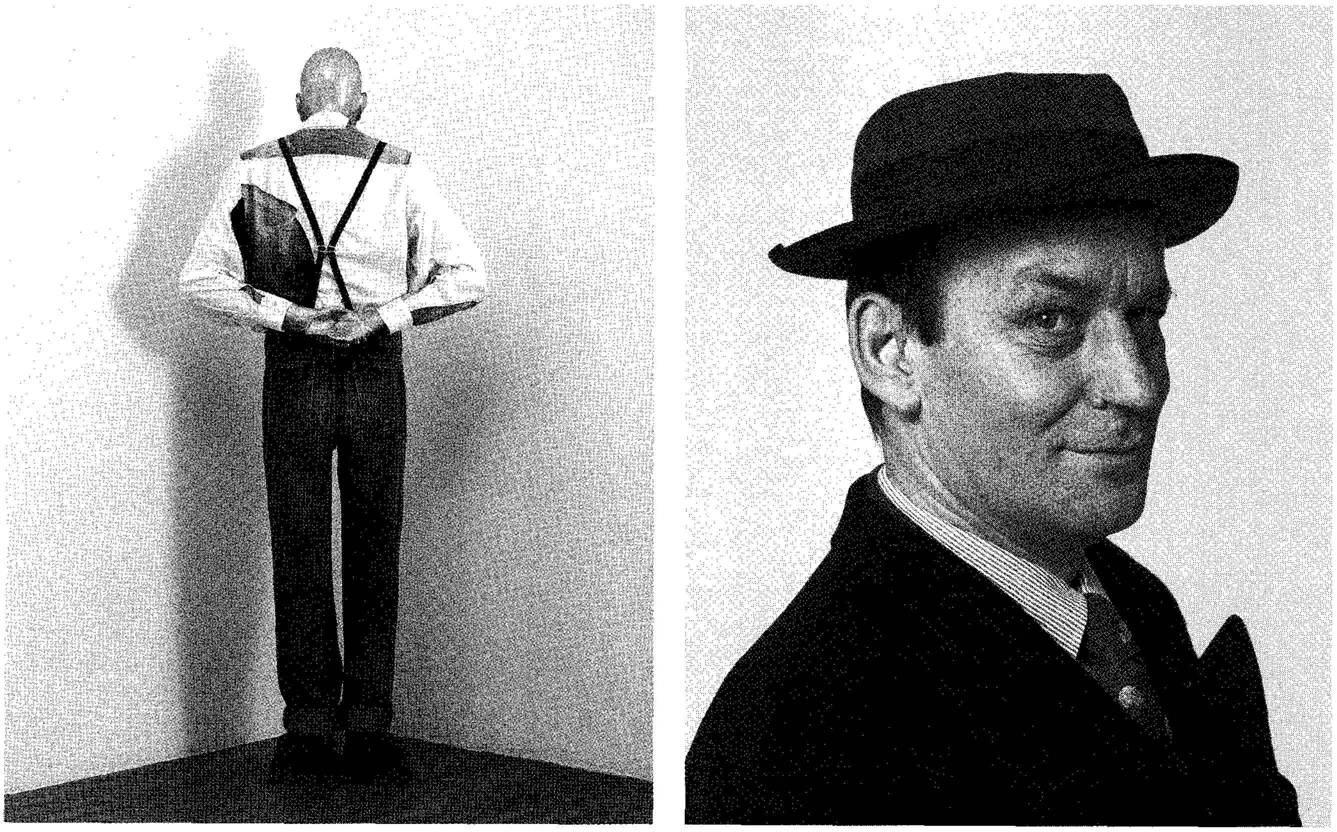
Why, then, does the show, which originated at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (and was organized by its senior curator, Ann Goldstein), exude a distinct, hard-to-deny majesty? I think that it's because Kippenberger's career, as a whole, was consciously his one actual work: it both epitomizes and burlesques the art game's pell-mell institutional, commercial, and academic expansion in the biennial-bedizened nineteen-eighties and nineties.

Kippenberger was born in Dortmund and grew up in the industrial environs of Essen. He was the middle child, with four sisters, of a father who managed a coal mine and a mother who was a doctor. His sister Susanne, a writer, remembers him as a demanding and even domineering child. He attended a "strict evangelical" boarding school in the Black Forest, where he boycotted art classes after the teacher had the effrontery to award him only the second-highest grade in the class. Kippenberger quit school at the age of fifteen and, in short order, trained as a window dresser, was fired for using drugs, travelled in Scandinavia, underwent psychotherapy at a farm near Hamburg, lived in various communes, and studied at the Hamburg Art Academy. In 1976, he inherited considerable wealth when his mother, who was already ill with cancer, was killed by a shipping palette that slipped off a truck. (Shipping palettes, employed matter-of-factly, would figure often in his art.) He promptly moved to Florence, with brief ambitions to become an actor. There he painted about seventy identical-size canvases in black and white from multifarious, banal postcards and snapshots, emulating a style of works by Gerhard Richter. Kippenberger planned to do enough of them so that when stacked they would match his height, but he lost interest inches shy of that goal.

He returned to Hamburg in 1977, meeting, or, rather, ganging up with, fellow young artists—including the insolently virtuosic abstract painter Albert Oehlen—who, like him, were in Oedipal revolt against Joseph Beuys, Richter, Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, and other fixtures of the growing German preëminence in contemporary art. Kippenberger's works, from then on, might be considered a series of studied insults to that legacy, even as he took on the mantle of its prestige, as the crown prince of German genius. (He left the succession in poor shape, with no heir apparent to this day.) Toward the formerly reigning American art he struck an attitude of affable condescension, enlisting numerous of our local heroes, such as Mike Kelley and Christopher Wool, to design the publicity for some of his shows. To the extent that his work displays any American influence, in paintings reminiscent of Julian Schnabel or David Salle, the spirit is parodic.

Moving to West Berlin in 1978, Kippenberger commenced blowing his inheritance on organizing exhibitions and concerts (flying in artists and acts from far and wide), running a C.B.G.B.-like night club, founding a punk band, and otherwise dominating the walled city's febrile bohemia. In 1980, in Paris, he holed up in Left Bank hotels to write a novel, but never completed it. The next year found him in Siena and Stuttgart—and here I give up recording Kippenberger's ricochets amid sites and scenes in Germany, Belgium, France, Spain, America, Brazil (where, in 1986, he bought a derelict gas station, which he designated an art work and, strumming his homeland's jumpy historical nerves, named for Martin Bormann), Canada, Greece, and elsewhere. Toward the end of his life, he planned a network of ostensible, fully outfitted subway-station entrances at seven points on the globe—suggesting the existence of a planetary underground system—with motorized air vents at sites in between. He finished three, in Leipzig, Germany; Syros, Greece; and Dawson City, in the Yukon. That project's forced wit and laborious execution are echt Kippenberger: faintly amusing and patently obvious. His best critic, the German Diedrich Diederichsen, nails the effect—or is it a syndrome?—in the show's excellent catalogue, as that of artists whose aim is to make art "a deeply embarrassing affair." It sometimes seems that for an idea to be viable to Kippenberger it had to reek of hapless mediocrity.

Kippenberger regularly generated complex, exhausting labors for curators, critics, dealers, and administrators of art institutions, at a time of beavering professionalization in those fields. A Google check will hurtle you into a maelstrom of earnestly wild-goose-chasing Kippenberger analysis. His art's historical logic left the mandated functionaries no choice, by braiding strands of avant-gardist heroism from Picasso and Duchamp to Beuys and Richter, never mind that the result is tatty and frayed. His combined audacity and self-awareness make rivals like Damien Hirst and Matthew Barney seem fidgety and precious by comparison.



Kippenberger's "Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself" (1992), and the artist in 1996.

LEFT: ESTATE MARTIN KIPPENBERGER/GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN; RIGHT: ELFIE SEMOTAN

Kippenberger's key works, for me, are a series of assembled sculptures called "Peters," which he produced in the late nineteen-eighties. In German, *Peter* means "guy," and, when used as a suffix, may denote a role or an attribute (as we say "cable guy"). Kippenberger adopted it as shorthand for any stylistic tic by which artists identify or brand—and, thereby, caricature—themselves. ("Peter-ness" might be interpreted as "ness-ness.") A dizzying mishmash of techniques and vaguely familiar styles—in wood and steel, furniture and mirrors, photographs and printed signs—the Peters express a spirit of swing-barrelled derision, hinting that every conceivable artistic attitude is inescapably vain and self-defeating. For the most notorious of the pieces, Kippenberger built a coffee table, using an abstract painting by Richter, which he had bought, for the top. (The piece sold at what amounted to a steep discount.) Other Peters immortalize banana peels in cast resin, present an Aldo Rossi chair with holes drilled in it, and entitle a gawkily carpentered wooden enclosure "Playpen for Brochures." Most of the subjects are unclear, but you may still feel their pain, as the artist gores them.

Kippenberger and the MOMA show make the best cases for themselves with "The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika' " (1994), a vast installation in the museum's atrium. The work represents the recruitment center for the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, where Kafka's immigrant hero applies for work, as a warren of office furniture and bizarre objects on an abbreviated soccer field. There are thrift-store and classic modern chairs (an Eames, a Gehry), similarly miscellaneous lamps, concentration-camp and lifeguard watchtowers, and a carrousel of two cockpit ejector seats around a sculpture of a fried egg. Bleachers are provided from which we may gaze our fill at nothing happening. It makes stirring sense for Kippenberger, a paladin of uncalled-for gestures, to identify with the disconcertingly upbeat "Amerika," so at odds with Kafka's signature tales of dread. The allusion endorses the artist's serious refusal to be serious, even in late works—such as photographs and paintings in which he strikes poses of the victims in Gericault's "Raft of the Medusa"—that project his mortal ruin. I can think of few other artists so richly deserved by their times. For that very reason, whenever I go to contemplate a contemporary art work for pleasure, it will not be a Kippenberger. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the Los Angeles Times.

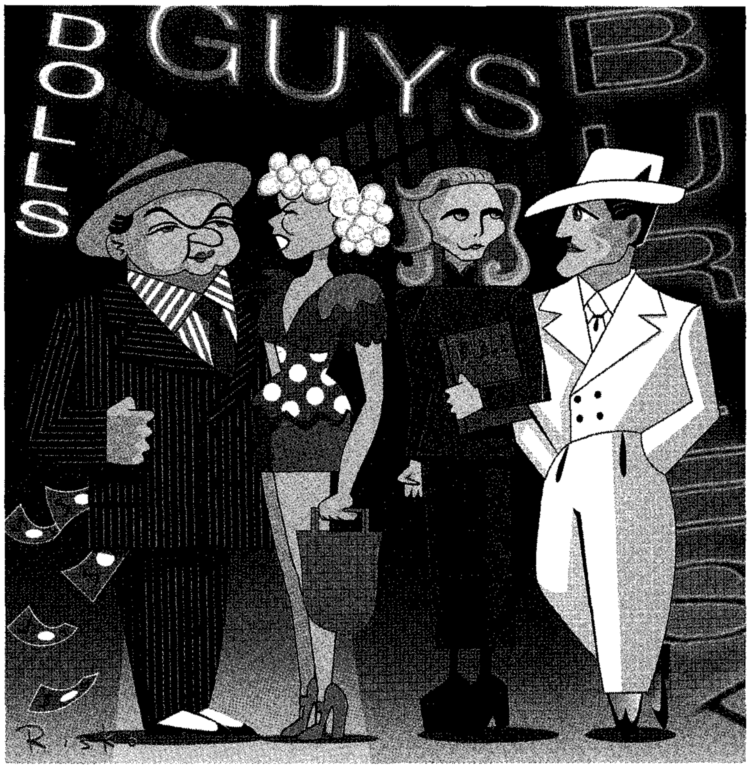
Investors are caught like a deer in the headlights, wondering what will be the next shoe to drop.

THE THEATRE

BROADWAY BOOGIE-WOOGIE

"Guys and Dolls" rolls the dice again.

BY JOHN LAHR



Luck be a lady: Platt, Graham, Grant, and Bierko gamble on love.

ROBERT RISKO

With all due respect to Nathan Detroit, the palooka who regularly runs a craps game behind the Biltmore garage in "Guys and Dolls" (in revival at the Nederlander), the oldest established permanent floating craps game in New York is actually the Broadway musical. A big roll of the dice, the musical is a paradigm of pluck 'n' luck, the jackpot in cap and bells. "Guys and Dolls," based on Damon Runyon's stories and subtitled "A Musical Fable of Broadway," mines both the rollicking vulgarity and the gleeful rapacity of the rialto. No wonder the show is so jubilant, so eloquent, so pitch-perfect. Has the big-risk-big-reward notion of entrepreneurial capitalism ever worn a happier face? From the first note of "Fugue for Tinhorns"—when the small-time gambler Nicely-Nicely Johnson picks a nag called Paul Revere—we are thrown into the thrilling hubbub of winning and losing, the hustler's version of the American percentage play.

Before the show premièred, in 1950—it ran eleven hundred and ninety-four performances—songwriters frequently referred to Manhattan as a playground; "Guys and Dolls" made it one. Gaming, guzzling, gossiping, the mugs and molls who prowl its streets are all on the hunt: for riches, for love, and, in the case of the Salvation Army workers, for souls to be saved. They're having a helluva time. The question that must be asked of any musical is: Why do the characters sing? Here the audience is never in doubt. Broadway is too damn exciting; its denizens are too damn restless. ("ALWAYS OPEN 10 SHOWS A DAY," reads the blinking burlesque-house sign that is part of the almost overpowering neon glare of the current production.) The city is the buzz. "Where's the action?" "What's playing at the Roxy?" "What's in the *Daily News*?" "The Biltmore garage wants a grand." There's poetry to be limned from the empty streets "a couple of deals before dawn," and life lessons to be gleaned from shopping. "At Wanamaker's and Saks and Klein's / A lesson I've been taught: / You can't get alterations on a dress you haven't bought," the stripper Adelaide sings.

At the center of "Guys and Dolls," glowing like a kind of nuclear core, is Frank Loesser's gorgeous music, which is, to my mind, one of the high-water marks of the genre. Loesser was a pint-size perfectionist. (He once stepped on a stool in order to slap an actress who wasn't singing at full tilt.) "Guys and Dolls" is musical comedy, not musical theatre. Loesser's songs may not expand the psychology of the characters, but they're always *in* character. His music and lyrics have tremendous range; they play the same high-low comic game as Runyon's stories, combining highfalutin classical-music elements with vulgar circumstances. For instance, "Oldest Established," a hymn to Nathan's craps game, ends as a cantata; his hustlers tip the ponies in Bach-like counterpoint. Loesser is one of the few lyricists who are genuinely funny in song; he revels in the sludge of urban locutions, and his lyrics are a feast of witty surprises. (He uses "streptococci" in song, for God's sake!) Words sit on the notes with uncanny ease and make them seem inevitable. "There are well-heeled shooters / Ev'rywhere ev'rywhere," the avid gamblers sing. "And an awful lot of lettuce / For the fella who can get us there." Loesser plays a demotic game with slang and syntax, a brilliant simulacrum of Runyon's comedy of manners. "Alright, already, it's true, so nu?" Nathan sings to Adelaide, claiming to love her despite all evidence to the contrary. "So sue me, sue me, / What can you do me?" Like Runyon's prose, the songs engineer a collision of punctilio and illiteracy. "So take back your mink, / To from whence it came," Adelaide sings during her specialty striptease at the Hot Box Club. "And tell them to Hollanderize it / For some other dame." The "from whence" just kills me.

The director, Des McAnuff, who knows his way around musical theatre, and whose most recent gold mine was "Jersey Boys," delivers a successful slick evening, but not without stumbling out of the gate. "Guys and Dolls" traditionally opens with the trumpet voluntary of the "Racetrack First Call"; here, instead of beginning with a laugh that instantly draws the audience into the hustlers' comic universe, McAnuff imposes a reverential, overproduced, cornball preamble that leaves nothing to the imagination. We move from an image of Runyon typing the play's title onto a behemoth rear-projected downstage screen to a choreographed illustration of the louche New York underworld from which his characters emerged. After much generic Broadway bustle—from racetrack and subway to pool hall and boxing gym—we come to the newsstand where the gamblers are studying the racing forms, at which point Abe Burrow's tightly written, original book begins. Inevitably, the great opening song loses much of its wallop. But, once McAnuff stops competing with the musical's ingeniousness and settles down to serve the story, all is pretty much well. He nails "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat," the show's eleven-o'clock number, by making Nicely-Nicely (Tituss Burgess) strut his gospel stuff on a row of empty chairs. Gleeful, rousing, and eye-popping, the staging is McAnuff at his inventive best.

"We want people with bumps," Cy Feuer, one of the original producers of "Guys and Dolls," said of casting the show. As the current Nathan Detroit, the gambler who can't bring himself to bet on marriage, Oliver Platt is certainly an image of bumpiosity. A big man with a pickle nose and a belly that precedes him by a foot or so, Platt and his pinstriped suit are permanently rumpled. His Nathan, under pressure from the crapshooters to find a place to gamble and from Adelaide (Lauren Graham) to hand over a ring, sweats and dithers to charming effect. "The boys are slightly fatigued from weariness," Nathan tries to explain to Big Jule (the excellent Glenn Flesher), who wants to recoup his losses by using his own loaded dice. Platt's understated ambivalence is a good match for Graham's emotional full-court press. As the blond and frazzled Adelaide, who suffers from psychosomatic sneezing for lack of a marriage license, Graham makes a terrific Broadway début; she is a potent combination of sweetness and sexuality. "If she's getting a kind of a name for herself/And the name ain't his,/A person—can develop a cough," Adelaide sings in her famous lament. Graham's delight in the character is palpable across the footlights. She seems too young and too fresh for the lovelorn Adelaide, who has been waiting for fourteen years to become Mrs. Detroit. No matter, Graham's sly sense of humor and her clever delivery give her a winning fragility. Without overselling Adelaide's desperation or her dopiness, she captures both the role's poignance and its piquancy. "Tell him I never want to talk to him again," she sniffles to Sky Masterson (Craig Bierko), after one of many breakups. "And have him call me here!"

In the musical's parallel romantic universe, Masterson, on a bet, pursues the pious, unbiddable Sarah Brown (Kate Jennings Grant), who is finally seduced by his suave good looks. Bierko, who has a strong voice and a strong chin, gives Masterson a credible whiff of daring and decency. Grant's starchiness, a certain reserve in her lean frame, also works well for Sarah as they sing about their ideal partners. "Mine will come as a surprise to me/Mine, I leave to chance—and chemistry," Masterson says. The lovers' chemistry has sufficient amperage. They fall under the spell of romance; the production falls under the spell of technology, which, at times, threatens to upstage the hardworking ensemble. (Dustin O'Neill's video designs are projected onto a gargantuan backdrop.) It is hard enough for the actors to win over the audience, let alone to defeat the set. But, in the end, "Guys and Dolls" trumps even stage effects; nothing but a four-alarm fire in the theatre would prevent these wonderful characters and memorable songs from coming across.

"Guys and Dolls" débuted when America was a powerhouse; this lively revival arrives when the country is in the poorhouse. To see how the show's infectious buoyancy plays out in an entirely different economic and emotional climate is fascinating. If anything, the desperation of the story is closer to our own, and so is its mission of good times. Courage, after all, wants to laugh. ♦

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THE SKY LINE

TODDLIN' TOWN

Daniel Burnham's great Chicago Plan turns one hundred.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

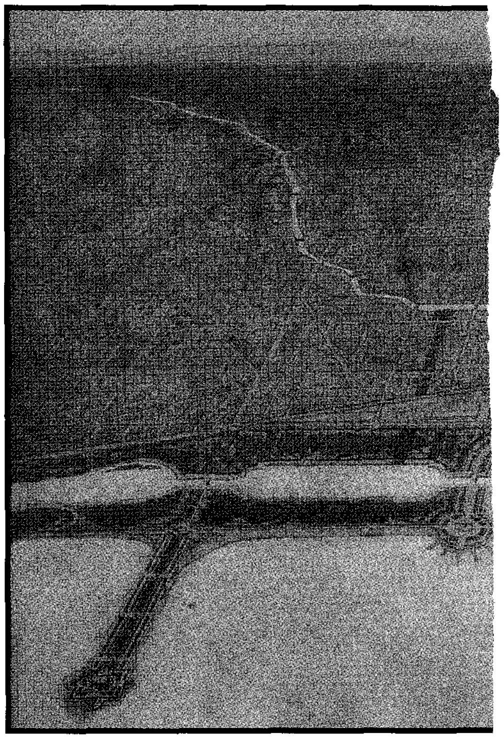
In the mid-eighteen-nineties, Daniel Burnham, then the most prominent architect in Chicago, met with a young architect named Frank Lloyd Wright. Burnham had been impressed by Wright's talent but felt that he could use some seasoning. He offered to pay Wright's tuition at the École des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, to support his family, and to give him a job when he returned. Wright turned him down. It was one of the few times that Burnham, who was probably the most successful power broker the American architectural profession has ever produced, didn't get his way, and he told Wright that he was making a mistake: the Beaux-Arts style, of which Burnham was a leading exponent, was taking over the country, and Wright was deluded if he thought that his modern approach, with its open spaces and horizontal lines, would ever amount to much.

Burnham and Wright went their separate ways, but their paths kept crossing, because if you had anything to do with American architecture around the turn of the century you inevitably ran into Burnham. He designed the Flatiron Building, in New York; Union Station in Washington, D.C.; Orchestra Hall in Chicago; Selfridges department store, in London; and more banks and office buildings than you could count. He got the train tracks that had despoiled the Mall in Washington for much of the nineteenth century removed and headed a Washington planning commission that, among other achievements, set the location for the Lincoln Memorial. Most important of all, a hundred years ago, in 1909, Burnham completed work on a document with the unassuming title "Plan of Chicago" that remains the most effective example of large-scale urban planning America has ever seen. Assisted by the young city planner Edward H. Bennett, he laid out the shorefront of Lake Michigan, quadrupling the amount of parkland and thus insuring that the lakefront would forever be public open space. He created the Magnificent Mile, the double-decker roadway of Wacker Drive, and the recreational Navy Pier, which extends into Lake Michigan. Envisioning Chicago as the anchor of an enormous region, he drafted a rough outline of highways to connect the city to the places around it. Quite simply, Burnham determined the shape of modern Chicago.

Chicago is marking the centennial of the Burnham plan with a yearlong festival of exhibitions and public events, including the construction, this June, of architectural pavilions in Millennium Park by Zaha Hadid and Ben Van Berkel—odd choices, given that their avant-garde allegiance would have been anathema to Burnham. Still, the scale of the celebrations seems apt. Burnham is famous for the line "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood." There is little evidence that he really said this, but everything he did suggests that he believed it. If Theodore Roosevelt had been an architect, he would have been Daniel Burnham.

Burnham was born in 1846, grew up in Chicago, and never went to architecture school. After trying his luck as a salesman, he fell into an apprenticeship in the office of William Le Baron Jenney, who built the first steel-framed skyscraper, and then set up a firm with John Wellborn Root. He and Root proved to be perfect partners: Root was a far more sophisticated architect, but Burnham excelled at bringing in business. The firm flourished in the construction boom following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and, in 1890, the partners were retained to advise on the plans for Chicago's first World's Fair. Burnham turned himself into an impresario, assembling a team of architectural rivals, including Richard Morris Hunt, Charles F. McKim, and Louis Sullivan, and assigning them each a building. (Root died of pneumonia early in the planning stage.) Chicago's 1893 World's Fair was a historic success. At a time when even the most prosperous American cities were dirty, squalid, and dangerous, the fair seemed to offer the promise of another kind of urban world entirely. Known as the White City, it launched the City Beautiful movement, giving the country a seemingly insatiable appetite for monumental courthouses, museums, libraries, and train stations that made every city look as if its roots went back to ancient Rome.

Burnham decided to make the fair a template for the future of Chicago, and trumpeted the virtues of the City Beautiful to anyone who would listen. He had the instincts of a politician, and skillfully worked himself into Chicago's power structure. In 1906, he secured the backing of an association of prominent businessmen, which paid for a staff; Burnham himself worked for nothing. He set up a penthouse office in the Railway Exchange Building, an enormous building that he had designed on Michigan Avenue, across from the Art Institute, and started by instructing his staff to gather data on major cities around the world. As the plan was coming together, he invited various influential people to the penthouse—the governor, the mayor, local politicians and businessmen, and fellow-architects like Wright and Sullivan—to test his ideas. It didn't hurt that they could look out on the most spectacular view of the lakefront imaginable.

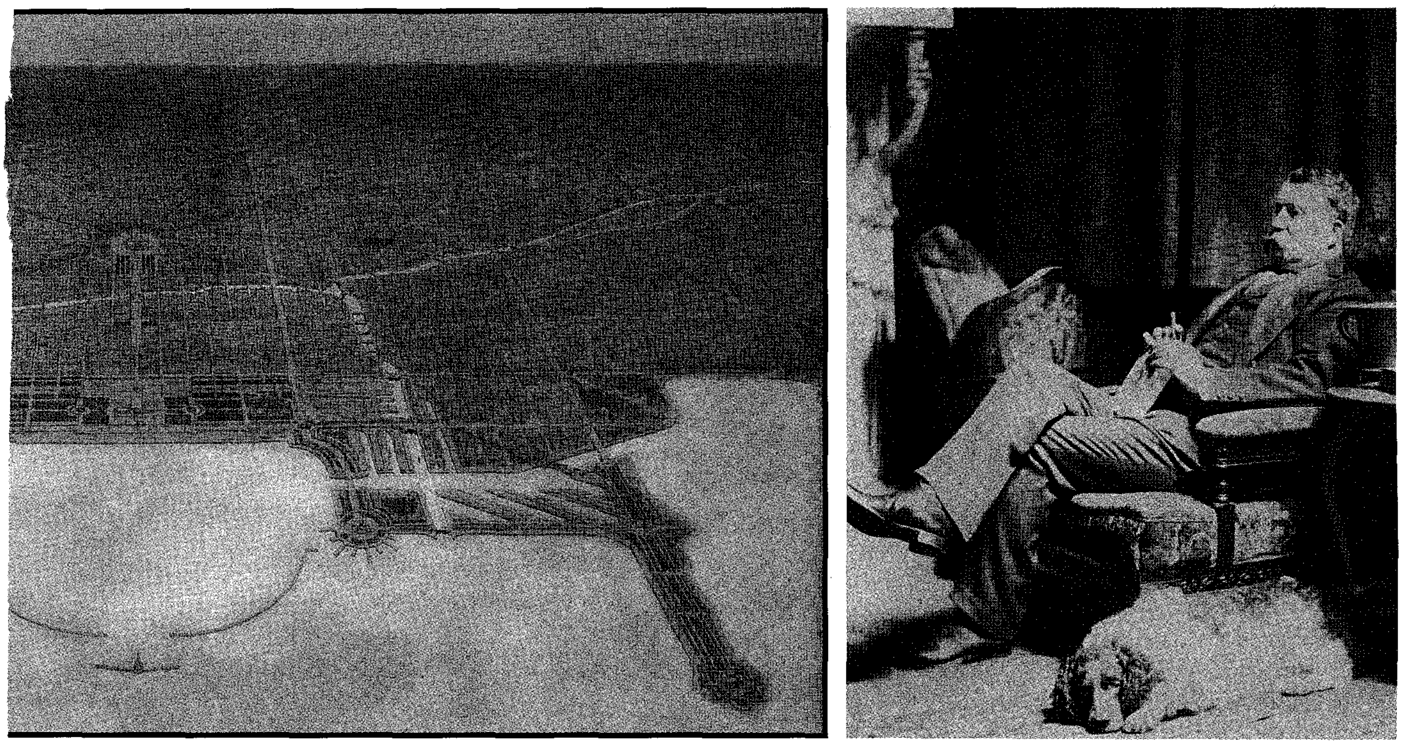


Burnham was famous for the dictum "Make n

When the Plan of Chicago was made

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO; RYERSON AND BURNHAM ARCHIVES/ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

public, in 1909, it was published in a hundred-and-fifty-page book. Along with Burnham's maps and plans, the book contained a series of stunning watercolors by Jules Guerin. Soft, hazy, and alluring, the pictures romanticized the immense metropolis, making it look like the seat of an empire. Burnham wanted to remake the city along the lines of Paris—the plan gained the nickname Paris on the Prairie—and, to a large extent, he succeeded, prescribing a series of projects that kept the city busy through the nineteen-twenties. Some things, such as a gargantuan civic center that would have made Les Invalides, in Paris, seem modest, were never built. But the campus of museums on the lakefront—including the Field Museum of Natural History, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Museum of Science and Industry—and the network of parks, boulevards, piers, and lagoons that have kept the area in public hands for a century is the plan's enduring legacy. It forms a startling contrast to the elevated highways and industrial buildings that have come to obstruct the waterfronts of most other American cities.



ittle plans," and Jules Guerin's alluring watercolor renderings in the published "Plan of Chicago" gave this vision an ethereal cast.

At the time of Burnham's death, in 1912, at the age of sixty-five, he was the most eminent city planner in the country, if not the world. But in later decades the Olympian vision he put forth for Chicago came to seem formal and impersonal. According to Lewis Mumford, it showed "no concern for the neighborhood as an integral unit, no regard for family housing, no sufficient conception of the ordering of business and industry themselves as a necessary part of any larger achievement of urban order." Jane Jacobs called Burnham's ideas "irrelevant to the workings of cities," and suggested that his emphasis on monumental grandeur had actually made things worse in neighborhoods that, for her, were the soul of the city. To Jacobs, Burnham was Robert Moses with better taste.

It's true that Burnham's autocratic ways would be unthinkable today. But Mumford and Jacobs, writing when the automobile had begun to drain life from the urban street, failed to see that Burnham's monumental style strove for social betterment as well as aesthetic uplift. Before Burnham, Chicago was raucous and congested, growing helter-skelter with minimal concern for social welfare. Burnham understood the public's hunger for environments that would impart a hint of fantasy to the humdrum routines of daily existence. Certain that the time had come "to bring order out of the chaos incident to rapid growth," he said that "beauty has always paid better than any other commodity and always will." The architectural historian Kristen Schaffer, while preparing an introduction for a recent reprint of Burnham's plan, looked at an early draft and discovered that Burnham had some surprisingly radical social notions. He called for day-care centers, police stations in which all police activities would be open and visible to the public, and improved housing for the poor, "in common justice to men and women so degraded by long life in the slums that they have lost all power of caring for themselves." For Schaffer, Burnham's draft indicates a belief that cities were not only "for the capitalist, but for those who found themselves in police custody or those too poor to support their children." It's a pity that more of these amenities weren't built, but even the parts of the plan that were convey Burnham's public-spiritedness. Far from being forbidding, places like North Michigan Avenue and Navy Pier are usually teeming with people. Burnham's belief in the public realm was so powerful that it transcended all else, and it remains convincing.

Long after Burnham's death, Frank Lloyd Wright told a lecture audience, "Thanks to Dan Burnham, Chicago seems to be the only great city in our States to have discovered its own waterfront." Chicago, Wright said, was the most beautiful city in the country, and he gave the credit for this to Burnham, whose architecture he could never abide. ♦

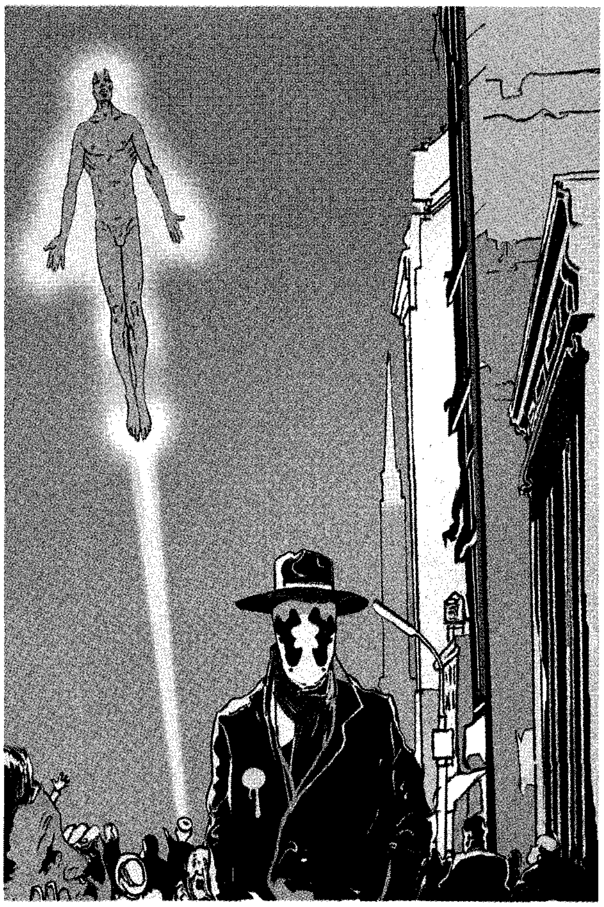
THE CURRENT CINEMA

DARK VISIONS

"Watchmen" and "Leave Her to Heaven."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The world of the graphic novel is a curious one. For every masterwork, such as "Persepolis" or "Maus," there seem to be shelves of cod mythology and rainy dystopias, patrolled by rock-jawed heroes and their melon-breasted sidekicks. Fans of the stuff are masonically loyal, prickling with a defensiveness and an ardor that not even Wagnerians can match. One lord of the genre is a glowering, hairy Englishman named Alan Moore, the co-author of "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" and "V for Vendetta." Both of these have been turned into motion pictures; the first was merely an egregious waste of money, time, and talent, whereas the second was not quite as enjoyable as tripping over barbed wire and falling nose first into a nettle patch. In each case, the cry from readers was that the movie was doomed by its treacherous departure from the original; Moore distanced himself from both productions, and he has done so again with the new adaptation of "Watchmen." The movie was written by David Hayter and Alex Tse, and directed by Zack Snyder, but nowhere do we see the name of Moore.



Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach in Zack Snyder's movie.

ISTVAN BANYAI

The bad news about "Watchmen" is that it grinds and squelches on for two and a half hours, like a major operation. The good news is that you don't have to stay past the opening credit sequence—easily the highlight of the film. In contrast to all that follows, it tells its tale briskly, showing how a bunch of crime-fighters formed a secret club known as the Minutemen, who in turn were succeeded by the Watchmen. This entails a whisk through history from the nineteen-forties to the eighties, with shots of masked figures shaking hands with John F. Kennedy, posing with Andy Warhol, and so forth; these are staged like Annie Leibovitz setups, and, indeed, just to ram home the in-joke, we later see a Leibovitz look-alike behind a camera. But must we have "The Times They Are A-Changin' " in the background? How long did it take the producers to arrive at that imaginative choice? And was Dylan happy to lend his name to a project from which all tenderness has been excised, and which prefers to paint mankind as a bevy of brutes?

As far as superheroes go, two's company but three or more is a drag, with no single character likely to secure our attention: just ask the X-Men, or the Fantastic Four, or the half-dozen Watchmen we get here. There is Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley), a slip of a psychopath, his face often obscured by a bandagelike mask, on which inky patches constantly blot and re-form. There is Dan (Patrick Wilson), better known as Nite Owl, who keeps his old superhero outfit, rubbery and sharp-eared, locked away in his basement, presumably for fear of being sued for plagiarism by Bruce Wayne. There is the Comedian, real name Eddie Blake (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), whose tragic end, early in the film, we are invited to mourn, but who gets his revenge by popping up in innumerable flashbacks. There is Laurie, who goes by the sobriquet of Silk Spectre, as if hoping to become a top-class shampoo; she is played by Malin Akerman, whose line readings suggest that she is slightly defeated by the pressure of pretending to be one person, let alone two. Then there is Adrian Veidt (Matthew Goode), who likes to be called Ozymandias. Goode played Charles Ryder in last year's "Brideshead Revisited," and I fear that, even as Ozymandias murders millions from his Antarctic lair, which he does at the climax of "Watchmen," Goode's floppy blond locks and swallowed consonants remain those of a young gadabout who might, at worst, twist the leg off his Teddy bear.

Last and hugest is Dr. Manhattan (Billy Crudup), who is buff, buck naked, and blue, like a porn star left overnight in a meat locker. Whether his fellow-Watchmen have true superpowers, as opposed to a pathological bent for fisticuffs, I never quite worked out, but this guy is the real deal. He was once a physicist, but, after an unfortunate mishap, he found himself reintegrated as a radioactive being, equipped to peer into the future, nip to Mars for the afternoon, and divide into multiples of himself for nuclear-powered group sex. I felt sorry for Crudup, a thoughtful actor forced to spout gibberish about the meaning of time and, much worse, to have that lovely shy smile of his wiped by special effects. Dr. Manhattan is central to Moore's chronological conceit, which is that President Nixon (Robert Wisden), having used our blue friend to annihilate the Vietcong, wins the Vietnam War and, by 1985—the era in which the bulk of the tale takes place—is somehow serving a third term.

"Watchmen," like "V for Vendetta," harbors ambitions of political satire, and, to be fair, it should meet the needs of any leering nineteen-year-old who believes that America is ruled by the military-industrial complex, and whose deepest fear—deeper even than that of meeting a woman who requests intelligent conversation—is that the Warren Commission may have been right all along. The problem is that Snyder, following Moore, is so insanely aroused by the look of vengeance, and by the stylized application of physical power, that the film ends up twice as fascistic as the forces it wishes to lampoon. The result is perfectly calibrated for its target group: nobody over twenty-five could take any joy from the savagery that is fleshed out onscreen, just as nobody under eighteen should be allowed to witness it. You want to see Rorschach swing a meat cleaver repeatedly into the skull of a pedophile, and two dogs wrestle over the leg bone of his young victim? Go ahead. You want to see the attempted rape of a superwoman, her bright latex costume cast aside and her head banged against the baize of a pool table? The assault is there in Moore's book, one panel of which homes in on the blood that leaps from her punched mouth, but the pool table is Snyder's own embroidery. You want to hear Moore's attempt at urban jeremiad? "This awful city, it screams like an abattoir full of retarded children." That line from the book may be meant as a punky retread of James Ellroy, but it sounds to me like a writer trying much, much too hard; either way, it makes it directly into the movie, as one of Rorschach's voice-overs. (And still the adaptation won't be slavish enough for some.) Amid these pompous grabs at horror, neither author nor director has much grasp of what genuine, unhyped suffering might be like, or what pity should attend it; they are too busy fussing over the fate of the human race—a sure sign of metaphysical vulgarity—to be bothered with lesser plights. In the end, with a gaping pit where New York used to be, most of the surviving Watchmen agree that the loss of the Eastern Seaboard was a small price to pay for global peace. Incoherent, overblown, and grimy with misogyny, "Watchmen" marks the final demolition of the comic strip, and it leaves you wondering: where did the comedy go?

At first blush, "Leave Her to Heaven" has no firmer purchase than "Watchmen" does on emotional truth. Released in 1945, John M. Stahl's melodrama is showing at Film Forum, in a restored print. A vampiric beauty named Ellen (Gene Tierney) gets her talons into Harland, a vulnerable writer (Cornel Wilde), and refuses to let go. In the process, she lets his disabled brother drown, and aborts Harland's child by toppling down the stairs. Catch it on TV and you will find yourself complaining, "*Please.* No one behaves like that."

But there's the rub. Movies like Stahl's were not made for TV. Their purpose unfolds only on the big screen, where the blue-velvet skies and the lethally smooth waters of "Leave Her to Heaven" acquire the unquestioned clarity of a fever dream. A scornful James Agee, reviewing it at the time, said that the story might have been "plausible enough in a dramatically lighted black-and-white picture"; but plausibility is not the issue, and color is the lifeblood of the film. When Harland, fresh off a train from the East, wanders out into the New Mexico night, still wearing a dark city suit, we find ourselves at the border where noir and Western meet. As for the brother's death, with Ellen looking on coolly in white robe and shades, it remains one of the most perturbing in the history of Hollywood, far scarier than anything in "Watchmen"; where Snyder employs the latest tools of computer-generated imagery to jack up the foulness of his violence, and thereby renders it more absurd, Stahl takes the trouble to feel his way into the implications of three-strip Technicolor, and thus into the more vivid hues of the heart. First used for a full-length movie (Rouben Mamoulian's "Becky Sharp") a decade earlier, and brought to blooming fruition in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and "The Wizard of Oz," the new technology reached its astounding apogee in the lips of Gene Tierney, as red as a witch's apple. Each frame of her seems to be hand-tinted, as if she had ordered it. Her soft voice dies to a low whisper at the close of every phrase. "I don't want anybody else to do anything for you," she tells her husband. And with that, the great conservative promise of postwar domesticity—the man, newly arrived or returned, waited upon by his woman—tightens into a threat. ♦

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The Front Row, a new blog about movies.

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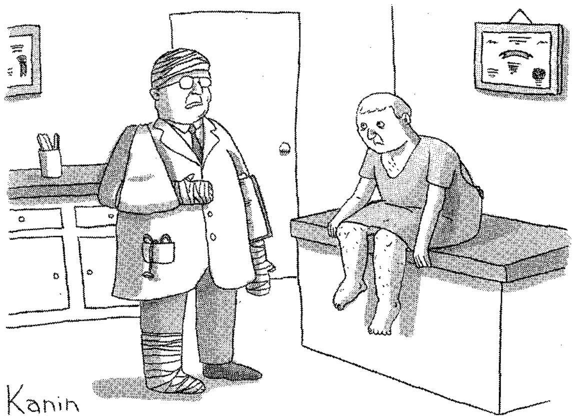
PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

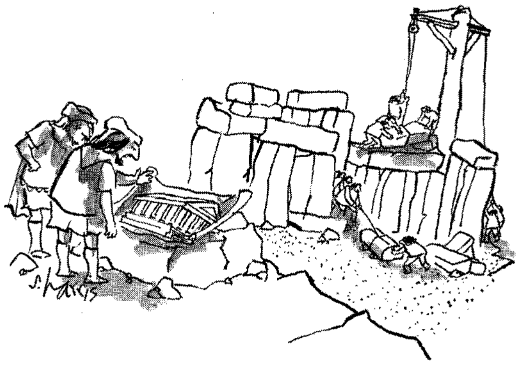
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Cheney, must be received by Sunday, March 8th. Finalists in the February 23rd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 23rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Until I recover, let's just assume your prostate is fine."
Jeff Goodman, Burnsville, N.C.



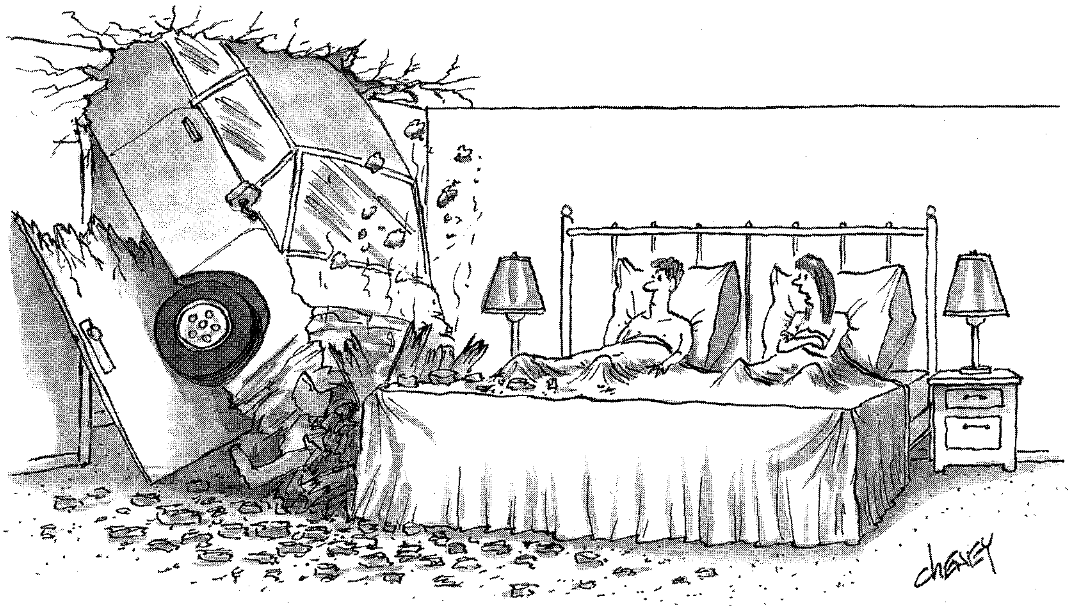
THE FINALISTS

"Tell me you kept the box and receipt."
Jae Choe, New York City

"Typical client—wants a damn Parthenon on a Stonehenge budget."
Karl Kindig, Abingdon, Va.

"Dude, Athena's gonna be pissed."
Alan Farkas, Los Angeles, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



"   "

Sprint

Consider your life juggled.

Get in cab and answer call from office.
Check tomorrow's calendar.
Confirm meeting address.
Read over presentation.
Send friend "happy birthday" email.
IM daughter.
Catch up on the latest headlines.
Go into meeting prepared and thankful that Sprint helped set up your phone.
Sprint
Start
Calendar
Email
Phone
Tasks
Messages
Notes
Bookmarks
Call History
Contacts
Web Search
htc

Windows Mobile

HTC Touch Pro™

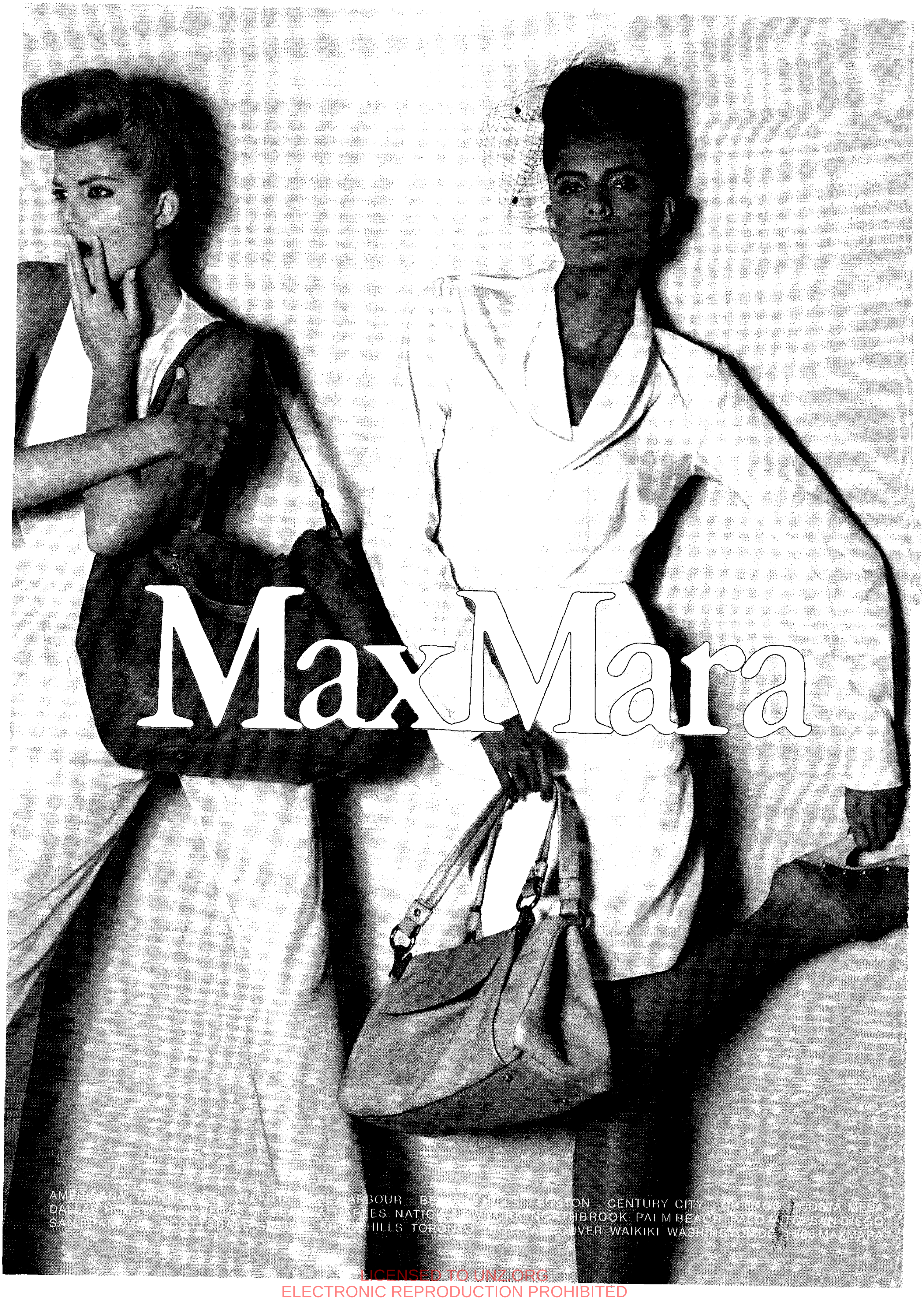
Get it on the Now Network.™

1-800-SPRINT-1 sprint.com/smartphones

ReadyNow
At participating stores.

May require up to a $36 activation fee/line, credit approval and deposit. Up to a $200 early termination fee/line applies. **Other Terms:** Coverage not available everywhere. Offers not available in all markets/retail locations or for all phones/networks. Pricing, offer terms, fees and features may vary for existing customers not eligible for upgrade. Other restrictions apply. See store or sprint.com for details. Sprint Mobile Broadband Network reaches over 249 million people. Coverage not available everywhere. ©2009 Sprint. Sprint and the logo are trademarks of Sprint. Microsoft and Windows Mobile are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies. Other marks are the property of their respective owners.

FOCUS on driving



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